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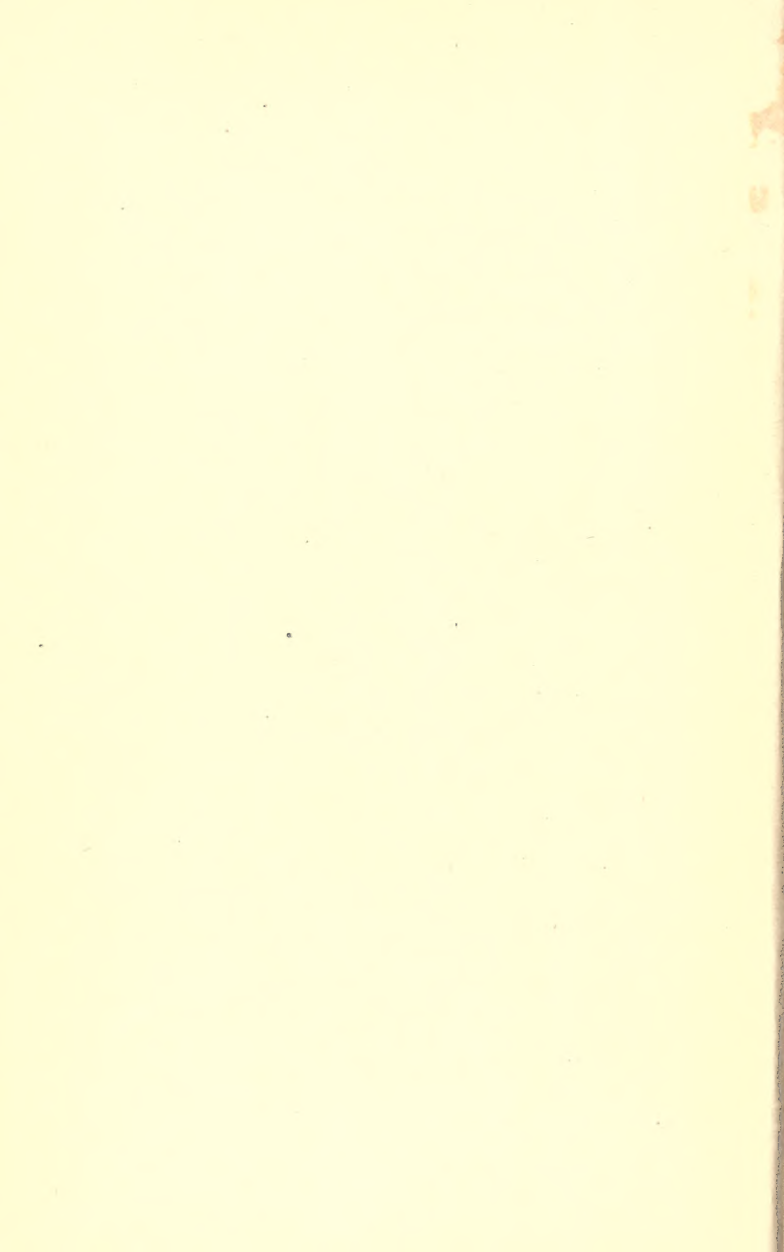






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THE LOGIC  
OF  
CHRISTIAN EVIDENCES.

BY  
G. FREDERICK WRIGHT.



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## P R E F A C E .

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As the connection clearly shows, the oft-quoted saying of Coleridge,<sup>1</sup> that he was weary of the word "Evidences of Christianity," is a rhetorical exclamation meaning no more than that the prevalent mode of presenting those evidences in his time was distasteful to him. Coleridge relied more exclusively than some upon the so-called internal evidences of Christianity; but these are "evidences," nevertheless, and must be comprehended in order to be felt.

In our own day also, the weight of high authority is given to the opinion that there is no more call for discussion of the evidences of Christianity, since believers are already satisfied with the grounds of their faith, and unbelievers will not give attention to anything which may be written upon the subject.

<sup>1</sup> Aids to Reflection. Concluding chapter.  
(iii)

It need not be said that the present writer takes a different view of the case. Even though some were so confirmed in their beliefs that all argument with them is foreclosed, we should not forget the young men and women whose opinions have not yet become fixed, and whose minds are destined to come more and more under the subtle and powerful influence of the prevailing habits of scientific thought. For the sake of these it is important to throw upon the foundations of our religious hope just the light which the present day affords. A substantial service will be rendered if the subject shall be so treated as not to exaggerate the antagonism between modern science and Christianity.

It is no disparagement of the older works upon the evidences of Christianity to say that they do not exactly meet the difficulties which now present themselves to inquiring minds. Nor is it any objection to the system that a re-statement of its evidences is so frequently required. From the nature of the case each generation approaches the subject from a slightly different point of view, and every man looks at Christianity through the medium of his own personal experience and intel-

lectual acquisitions. It is, in fact, confirmatory of the claims of the Christian religion that while its substance remains unchangeable it may in form adjust itself to different degrees of culture and diverse stages of civilization. This striking and characteristic prerogative it enjoys because it is a spiritual system, independent, in a remarkable manner, of transitory phases of intellectual and social development.

The aim of the present brief treatise is to bring into one view both the external and the internal evidences of Christianity as they now stand, and as they appear when compared with the evidences upon which the beliefs of science are based. While the discussion assumes considerable familiarity on the part of the reader with the general results of modern investigation, and is primarily addressed to those who have had a liberal education, it is hoped that none of it is beyond the reach of plain men and women of thoughtful turn who make up for their lack of school privileges by increased assiduity in their private reading and study. So far as (for the sake of brevity) technical language is used in the present work, such readers can easily gather the sense from the context.

It is needless to add that the scope of the present work does not permit discussion of the doctrine of inspiration, or of the special principles of scriptural interpretation. The question of the authenticity of the Christian narrative is prior to that of the inspiration of the Bible; and the doctrine of the infallibility of scripture can be intelligently considered only after inspiration has been satisfactorily defined and the credibility of the main facts of Christianity established.

To the friends who have so generously aided, and so patiently counselled in the production of this work, the thanks of the author are most heartily rendered.

G. FREDERICK WRIGHT.

FREE CHURCH PARSONAGE,  
ANDOVER, MASS., Jan. 1, 1880.



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PART I.

SOME PRINCIPLES OF INDUCTION  
STATED AND ILLUSTRATED.

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## CHAPTER I.

### PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS.

1. NATURE is a term used both in an active and in a passive sense. In its passive sense it stands for the causally connected sequences which appear in time and space. In the active sense it represents the forces which in their adjustments and conditions produce the phenomena of matter and finite mind. In using the word in its most general passive sense care is necessary to avoid confounding it with universe; for then there would seem to be no room left for the term "supernatural." On the other hand, if, like Dr. Bushnell, we reduce the conception of nature till it becomes merely a measure of events in the chain of physical causation, the word "supernatural" will be so comprehensive as to become unmanageable. A steam-engine, for example, is an effect above the sphere of physical causes, since an ideal element appears in its construction. Manifestly, however, it would be unfortunate to use the term

in such a limited sense that a steam-engine would be classed among supernatural objects.<sup>1</sup>

2. THE SUPERNATURAL, as used by theologians, is a generic word, which stands in general for phenomena supposed to originate outside the chain of natural forces. In theological science the supernatural is made to include the supposed facts of *providence* and *grace*, as well as miracles.

3. A MIRACLE is an unusual event of such a character as manifestly to imply an interruption of the established order of nature by a special agency of the Creator. The unusualness of the miracle corresponds to the exceptional character of the divine purpose it is supposed to reveal. Miracles are not for private interpretation, but are understood to be of public significance, and, by their extraordinary character, to serve as credentials to a divine message.

4. CHRISTIANITY is the religious system originating in the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. The motive power of the system is to be found in its peculiar doctrines concerning the endowments and condition of man, the character of God, and the person and offices of Jesus Christ. So far as

<sup>1</sup> See Professor E. A. Park's discussion in review of Bushnell's "Nature and the Supernatural" in *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Vol. xvi. pp. 426-437; and in Supplement to Article on Miracles in American edition of Smith's *Dict. of the Bible*. Also, the Duke of Argyll's "Reign of Law," pp. 6-11, and President Bascom's "Philosophy of Religion," chaps. v. and ix.

these doctrines are specifically Christian they are gathered from the direct teaching of Christ and his chosen disciples, as interpreted by the circumstances under which the words were first spoken or written ; together with such inferences as may fairly be drawn from the general facts of the life and ministry of Jesus and his apostles. The distinctive doctrines of Christianity pertain to supernatural facts, and in part purport to depend upon miracles for their authority. In discussing the present topic, the propriety of devoting a large amount of attention to the subject of miracles arises both from their evidential importance, if established, and from the fact that such events lie within the reach of scientific scrutiny, and admit of a certain kind of scientific verification.

5. THE PROBLEM before us in the present treatise is, however, something more than a mere consideration of the external evidence upon which belief in the New Testament miracles reposes. We shall endeavor concisely to estimate the relative weight of all the forms of evidence bearing upon the claims of a supernatural origin for Christianity, and of divine authority for its doctrines.

6. THE PROOF that the facts and doctrines of Christianity are supernatural is *inductive*, and consists in the comparative success with which the hypothesis of supernaturalism explains their exalted character, together with the early exis-

tence and acceptance of the New Testament literature, while accounting for the history, progress, distinguishing features, and present power of Christian faith in the world, as exhibited both in the experience of individuals and in society. It properly belongs to the Christian apologist to show that those who reject the supernatural element in Christianity drop the only reasonable clew leading out of an intricate labyrinth of historical and social phenomena.

7. There is nothing singular in the method of proof here indicated. It is the method employed in all inductive sciences. Knowledge of external things is necessarily inferential. "To draw inferences is the great business of life"; and an inference, whether in science or religion, is an exercise of faith, and can never be anything more. But an hypothesis is adequate only when it is seen to rest on a real analogy, and completely to accord with, while properly collocating, the phenomena under consideration. In the case in hand, two species of theory are in the field, offering to explain the distinctive facts of Christianity; viz. naturalism and supernaturalism. They separate upon the question of adequacy. Naturalism, through the "law of parsimony," attempts to set aside supernaturalism as superfluous; while supernaturalism affirms naturalism to be inadequate, in view of all the facts, and establishes itself upon

such residual phenomena as remain after natural causes have been made to do their utmost in solving the problem.

8. It should be noted, also, that the supernatural element in Christianity cannot be ignored solely on the plea that the evidence pointing to it is not so clear as we should think it might be. The scheme of the universe is extensive and complicated. It is difficult to tell, on general principles, what would constitute the best credentials to a supernatural revelation. In strengthening the argument for one generation there might be danger of putting succeeding generations to a disadvantage; and by multiplying miracles the boundary between the natural and the supernatural might be obscured. It is an important principle, that, respecting subjects of great practical concern, it is proper to make a virtue of necessity, and commendable to act with vigor upon such a degree of hope as the balance of probabilities and the nature of the case allow.

#### Division of the Subject.

In what follows upon the Logic of Christian Evidences, we propose:

I. First; to indicate some of the characteristics which distinguish inductive logic from deductive; illustrating the processes of the former by examples from prominent inductive sciences.



II. Second ; to consider the questions, “ Is there evidence in nature of the existence of a cause capable of producing miracles ? ” and, “ Can we discern signs of a sufficient reason for such a supersession of natural causes as the alleged miracles of Christianity imply ? ”

III. Third ; briefly to present the facts regarding Christianity which demand explanation, and to compare the several possible schemes for explaining and co-ordinating these facts.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE DISTINGUISHING FEATURES OF DEDUCTIVE AND INDUCTIVE LOGIC.

1. A Cretan once remarked that all the Cretans were liars and knaves. A bystander interposed: "But you are a Cretan!" Whereupon a neighbor added "Then, of course, he is a liar, and his testimony is worthless." To put this reasoning in the syllogistic form, it stands thus:

- (a) All Cretans are liars: (major premise)
- (b) This man is a Cretan: (minor premise)
- (c) Therefore he is a liar. (conclusion)

To this form all syllogisms in deductive logic can be reduced. But in such reasoning the question arises, How do we know *all*, before we know *each*? By what authority do we pronounce all the Cretans liars and knaves before the character of this particular Cretan has been observed? It would seem easier to prove the mendacity of this particular man than to establish the general proposition from which his untruthfulness is inferred.

2. To vary the illustration, consider the syllogistic form of Hume's objection to the proof of mira-

cles: (*a*) All purported miracles are incredible; (*b*) The resurrection of Christ is a purported miracle; (*c*) Therefore the resurrection of Christ is incredible (or, as he would say, incapable of being proved by human testimony). But how are all miracles known to be incredible till the particular evidence for this one is fully considered? Another form of stating Hume's argument illustrates the point still better: (*a*) All events which happened in the first century have a parallel in those occurring in the eighteenth century; (*b*) The resurrection of Christ has no parallel in the eighteenth century; (*c*) Therefore it is incredible that it really occurred in the first century. It is plain here, that the thing needing proof is the major premise from which the conclusion is drawn. On what grounds is it decided that the historical developments of the eighteenth century will perfectly correspond to those of the first? There is no known universal principle from which that conclusion follows. It would be more nearly correct to affirm that history will not *exactly* repeat itself in successive ages. Neither experience nor intuition sustains the doctrine that absolute uniformity pervades the universe. Supposing an intelligent Creator, the wisdom of the present order of things would partly consist in a due recognition of the past, and in a proper adjustment of present forces to the new conditions produced by the past.

3. Since deduction is based on a previous generalization, the process may easily be made to conceal the real steps of the reasoning. In a properly constructed syllogism the conclusion comes out of the premises mechanically. The difficulty lies in showing how it legitimately got into the premises. The process of deduction is nothing more than an analysis of the premises. In the conclusion the *implicit* contents of the premises are *explicitly* stated. But the conclusion must first have been involved, before it could be evolved. The progress, then, if any, in deduction, is towards clearness, rather than towards amplitude of knowledge. J. S. Mill<sup>1</sup> was not far from the truth in regarding the major premise as simply a register of previous inferences, and the syllogism itself as merely a skeleton on which to stretch our web of thought, the more readily to ascertain its contents and condition. Or, the major and minor premises may with propriety be compared to the upper and the nether millstones, between which the coarser products of our thought are ground to powder. But nothing can reach the bag which was not first put in at the hopper. Deductive logic belongs really among the pure sciences; and De Morgan was not far amiss in contending that it should be classed with mathematics.<sup>2</sup> Deduction can be

<sup>1</sup> Logic, Book II. Chaps. ii. and iii.

<sup>2</sup> See Jevon's "Principles of Science," (Vol. i. pp. 15-194); who, however, makes mathematics a department of logic.

performed on a calculating machine operated like a piano. The principles of deductive logic can be represented in geometrical figures and by algebraic symbols. However important to clearness the process of deduction may be, it is utterly unproductive of material additions to knowledge.

4. On the other hand, induction is productive. There is more in the inductive conclusion than appeared in the detached premises. Through the collocation of particular facts we reach general conclusions. From examination of present phenomena a certain condition of things in the past is inferred, and a certain other condition of things in the future is expected. E.g. from the limited knowledge in possession concerning the previous mortality of the race, it is *inferred* that all men are mortal, and that those still living will die. Putting together the facts known concerning the properties of ice, the transportation of boulders, and the striation of rocks by existing glaciers, and the facts concerning the distribution of drift and the general striation of rocks in the higher latitudes of the northern hemisphere, it is *inferred* that in America a continental glacier once extended near the coast, as far south as the latitude of New York City. Because the fish once ascended the unobstructed rapids in our rivers, we *infer* that shad and salmon will again return to the haunts of their ancestors, if, over the mill-dams, ladders are constructed for them.

5. In all these and similar cases, as the inference stands in its positive form, there is more in the conclusion than in the premises: something has been obtained before verification. The action of the mind upon separate phenomena has produced a *belief* which stands somewhere between certainty and ignorance. The draw-back to these inferences is, that they are not absolutely certain. They are open to objections, and are not secure from cavil. They are only probable conclusions. The gain in extension is accompanied by corresponding loss in certainty. The instincts of the fish may not be so permanent as was assumed. Omnipotence had *power* to create the world just as it is (scratches on the rocks and all), by a direct fiat. God *might* suddenly endow men with means of successfully resisting the dissolution of the body.

6. It is important to keep this infirmity of inductive conclusions in view, in order to remove the special reproach of inconclusiveness often cast upon Christian evidences. In the minds of some it is an objection to Christianity that its supernatural origin is not proved beyond possibility of doubt. There is much room for cavil concerning some of the prominent doctrines and facts of the Christian religion. But this arises from the circumstance that it belongs to the realm of actual things external to our personal consciousness.

Christianity has no generic infirmity which does not pertain to the whole family of inductive sciences. The question is whether it possesses any specific weakness which relegates its purported facts and doctrines to a region outside the ordinary principles of belief. All that can be properly required is, that the Christian system be proved beyond a reasonable doubt. What constitutes reasonable doubt depends upon a variety of considerations, to which attention must be given in the appropriate place.

7. In order to obtain a comprehensive view of the matters in hand, it is necessary to note more particularly the contrast between pure science and mixed science. In mathematics we are most familiar both with the name and the thing here indicated. There is demonstrative proof for every legitimate step in pure mathematics. In that department the mathematician does not *believe* his conclusions; he *knows* them. But in applied mathematics things of diverse natures are necessarily considered together. In pure mathematics we proceed from definitions and axioms to rear a self-consistent structure of thought. It is, however, nothing more than a structure of thought. All that can be said of its reality is that its actualization is possible within the limits of space and time. Pure mathematics does not determine whether or not these ideal



forms and combinations really exist. But into the calculations of applied mathematics elements of an entirely different character enter. Its problems are stated hypothetically. An "if" always intrudes upon the field. *If* the child grow four inches in height and two inches in girth every year, in how many years will he be a hundred feet high and fifty feet around? Here, an element of observation and of inference regarding the course of nature has been introduced.

8. In themselves the processes of mathematics are nothing but addition, subtraction, and the "rule of three." The things to be added, subtracted, and compared are furnished by observation and inference. In multiplication, the product is of the same denomination with the multiplicand. If the multiplicand be hypothetical the product must be the same. Whatever elements of uncertainty enter into the data appear again, more or less enlarged, in the result. In trigonometrical calculations a base line is first to be established by actual measurement. *If* the earth be eight thousand miles in diameter, and *if* the observation of the transits of Venus be accurate, and *if* the photosphere of the sun do not bulge out so irregularly as to destroy confidence in its stability of form, then the sun's distance from the earth can be calculated by trigonometry. But the uncertainty of these data leaves astronomers with two or three

million miles of uncertainty in their results. So, in attempting to estimate the age of the flint implements in the valley of the Somme, it is easy to obtain the dividend, but difficult to find the divisor. The physical changes which have taken place since man roamed with the mammoth and rhinoceros over the plains of Western Europe are manifest enough; but the action of the physical forces working these changes is problematical. In all such cases of inferential reasoning, theories must be restrained and determined by the facts in hand and conclusions tempered by possible or probable facts not yet in hand. Since in physical science, all conclusions are hypotheses, and the hypotheses are always more or less provisional, it is often difficult to draw the line between the established results of science and its problems. Scientific hypotheses pass through all stages of verification, and are of various degrees of uncertainty. There are some for which, if it were worth while, one might consent to go to the stake. There are others, lawful enough to be provisionally propounded, upon which it would not be wise to risk anything.

9. The case is not much different in the realm of ethics and religion. In that region, as elsewhere, man is lawfully held to the consideration of unyielding facts in experience and history. The realm of pure speculation is as unproductive in

ethics as in mathematics. In both, the possible includes an infinitely larger circle than the actual, or probable. What the objective law of right is, depends upon the attributes of the beings in existence. Such hopes as may be legitimately cherished by man, draw their nourishment from considerations touching the actual constitution of the soul and of the universe in which it exists. Inductive logic always holds us down to the vicinity of facts, and compels us to interrogate nature as to what really is. The Baconian method first chastens arrogance and curbs fancy, even though at length it furnishes wings on which to rise far higher than the imagination could otherwise soar. It is no excuse for unlicensed fancy, that, in every department of science, the facts and principles ascertained are more wonderful than the fictions dispelled. The system of nature does indeed infinitely transcend the conceptions of men. Still, since its origin is lost in the past, and the student is limited to an investigation of the unfolding phenomena, inductive science must concern itself not with what the universe might have been, but with the discovery of the actual course of nature. Neither in physical nor in mental science is it of much use for the theist to ask what it was possible for the Creator to do. The chief interest attaches to the more definite inquiry, What laws is it probable he has ordained?

10. When we proceed to study the course of nature we find ourselves in an order of things complex in the extreme, and of indefinite extent. In endeavoring to unravel this complexity, and to compass this volume of existence, the human mind at once becomes aware of limitations to its powers of comprehension. Man is limited in time and space. The report of external nature must all come through the imperfect language of sensation. As touching the actual world, man has absolute knowledge only of such things as transpire in his own experience. In space the universe stretches away indefinitely in both directions. The smallness of the atom is as inconceivable as the vastness of the stellar system. The microscope brings us no nearer to the secret workshop of nature than the telescope does to the field of her so-called great operations. Of none of the forces of nature can we tell with absolute completeness their ultimate origin or their final destiny. The highest function of man's intellectual nature is that power of thought which, from the disconnected facts of experience, elaborates far-reaching systems of *belief*. We frame hypotheses concerning those portions of nature which are beyond immediate reach of experiment. By well-known scientific methods, we test and verify theories ; after which they serve in all things both for doctrine and reproof. The sciences are thus a vast network of hypotheses

in different stages of verification, and to which we give credence, and, if need be, commit our interests, with various degrees of confidence.

11. The Christian apologist need not, however, glorify absolute ignorance. Descartes, indeed, began with doubt in order that he might believe; and it is well to acknowledge that the greater part of the universe is not only concealed from our view, but lies beyond the reach of human speculation. Still, unless we knew something to begin with, it would be useless to multiply what is in our possession. And the whole activities of the human race bear witness that man supposes himself able to enlarge the field of knowledge by reasoning on the facts of experience and upon the *dicta* of intuition. The great problem of philosophy is to explain how this can be. In matters where men do not have absolute wisdom they still continue to act upon what may be called practical wisdom. It is the good fortune of the Christian apologist, to be in company with all inductive reasoners, while defending the dignity and authority of that exercise of the understanding which in the Scriptures is said to be "the substance of things hoped for" and "the evidence of things not seen." This exercise of our reason is the only pledge of intellectual progress, and the only basis of moral activity. Faith is the mother of science, as well as of religion. What is called in science verifica-

tion is chiefly valuable as furnishing evidence upon which to believe other things not yet verified.

12. Canon Mozley has thus expressed the thought : Did we have "to wait for verification of evidence before we used it, we should be in the most extraordinary dilemma ; because we should have to wait till an event had happened before we could calculate on its happening, and depend on certainty as a preliminary stage of probability. The only likely future would be an ascertained past ; we could only foresee what *had* occurred, and only look forward correctly by looking backwards. We should have no prospective evidence." Probable reasoning is in its own nature, he continues, "unverified reasoning ; it *ipso facto* wants the fulfilment of experiment ; . . . . and yet it is capable of producing rational belief. Every fresh concurrence of circumstances is a ground upon which we reason, and upon which we predict, infer, conclude, something which is not mathematically contained in those circumstances, but to which they point. This ever new, fresh, living, ceaseless flow of interpretation and construction, which almost makes up life, is not knowledge, because its very nature is to be a substitute for knowledge. We reason toward a thing, *because* we do not know it ; and yet it is not blind guess-work ; there is evidence in it ; it produces belief."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University Sermons, by J. B. Mozley, D.D. (3d ed., London, 1877), pp. 52, 53.

The correctness of the principles, here briefly pointed out, will more fully appear as we follow out the trains of reasoning which enter into some of the more prominent sciences of the present day. To this more pleasing task we will now address ourselves, in the following chapter.



## CHAPTER III.

### ILLUSTRATIONS DRAWN FROM VARIOUS INDUCTIVE SCIENCES.

1. IN determining the character and authority of faith as exercised on religious subjects it is in place to illustrate at greater length its use in natural science.

Every science is essentially a play in three acts. The three stages through which belief is attained are *observation*, *explanation*, and *verification*. Simple observation and classification are far from constituting the chief work of that modern science in which the age prides itself. Ideas of order and congruity guide the observer to higher generalizations and more comprehensive systems of classification than could be attained by random examination. By comparing one observation with another conclusions are obtained regarding things outside the range of direct inspection. Isolated facts and separate phenomena may thereby be so grouped together as to reveal a meaning not belonging to them singly. After a collection of phenomena has been "simplified" by

the assumption of a comprehensive cause, it is the aim of the man of science to subject his hypothesis to every test calculated to estimate its adequacy and determine its truth.

For illustrations of the methods of induction we turn first to chemistry.

### I. Chemistry and Physics.

2. Chemistry is the typical experimental science. The "chemical method" is regarded by some as the model to which all scientific reasoning should be conformed. It is manifest, however, that there are few subjects to which this method can be applied at all, and that those are of a very limited nature. To establish a principle by experiment one must be able to command all the elements in the problem; but this can rarely be done.

3. For example, a proposition was made a few years ago to test, by the "chemical method," the efficacy of prayer for the sick. Those in certain hospital wards were to be selected as special subjects of prayer, while other wards, where the circumstances were as nearly similar as possible, were to be intentionally omitted from the prayers of all good people. It was gravely asserted that, if prayer be efficacious, such an experiment might determine the fact beyond dispute. But when the elements of the proposition are once clearly stated its preposterous character is apparent enough.

To apply the "chemical method" in such a case would require absolute control of the desires of all the good people who heard of the proposition, and the suppression of the prayers of all the unknown friends of those in the neglected wards, and even of the invalids themselves. Furthermore, such a proposition innocently adds an ingredient to the prayer transforming its very nature. To pray for the healing of the sick from a true regard to them, is one thing. To pray for a *sign* in the healing of the sick, which involves as manifestly the killing of some as the curing of others, is quite another thing. This would be like introducing *oil of vitriol* into an experiment where only *oil* was called for. In any case, to seek for such a sign as that involved in the above proposition would be something different from benevolence, and more than presumption. But this is only to illustrate the difficulty of attempting to test everything by the chemical method.

4. In extending the range of our thought to other subjects it readily appears that the things which can be put into a crucible, and directly observed during all their development, are very few. And chemistry itself has come to be far more than a mere classificatory science. The experimental facts of chemistry have been exceedingly fruitful of suggestion concerning things beyond the reach of observation. Chemists, like other men, have

had their doubtful working hypotheses, and have formed most recondite speculative conceptions, of which but small part have become accepted theories. Once combustion was explained by the supposed presence of an unseen principle called *phlogiston*, just as some continue to talk of electricity as a *fluid*. The present theory that heat is a mode of motion is now pretty well established; but the proof has not consisted in simple experiment. Its verification has only been accomplished by the highest exercise of the reasoning powers in comparing one experiment with another; and even now none but an expert adequately understands the ground of its acceptance. Heat and motion are easily seen to be, in some sense, correlative conditions. But it is not so plain to an ordinary observer that the transformation of one into the other is complete, and by an immediate process; nor do the most careful experiments measure the transformed forces with anything more than approximate accuracy.

5. By an easy transition, chemistry passes into "physics," and becomes responsible for the atomic theory of matter. The great names among chemists of the past century are those who have introduced into our conception of bodies the idea of ultimate particles of matter called atoms, possessing definite weights and combining with one another in constant ratios. To an ordinary reader

the new chemistry is a transcendental science, — weighing atoms that never can be felt, and analyzing molecules which must forever elude our sight. According to J. Clerk Maxwell,<sup>1</sup> “about two millions of molecules of hydrogen in a row would occupy a millimetre [.03937 of an inch], and about two hundred million million million of them would weigh a milligramme [.0154 of an English grain].” No one will be disposed to dispute the remark of another authority upon the subject, that “the determination of the exact [relative] atomic weight of an element is an operation of extreme difficulty, and one requiring the greatest analytical skill, so that as yet the atomic weights of only a limited number of elements have been ascertained with more than approximate accuracy.”<sup>2</sup> Even of the most accurately determined atomic weights, as of hydrogen and oxygen, it must be said they are only “*practically* perfect!”

6. Recently the spectroscope has come into vogue as an instrument of chemical analysis. Through its powerful aid physicists have rendered probable a similarity between the chemical conditions on the earth and those in the fiery heat of the sun, and in the diffused nebular dust of the most distant spaces. At the same time it casts doubt upon the integrity of the sixty or seventy

<sup>1</sup> Encyclopaedia Britannica (9th ed.), Vol. iii. p. 41.

<sup>2</sup> Professor H. E. Armstrong in Encyclopaedia Britannica (9th ed.) Vol. v. p. 468.

elements chemists have so laboriously discovered, and revives again the old question concerning the possibility of transmuting all the baser metals into gold.

7. In this connection, and since the things themselves are so far beyond the reach of direct experiment, it is instructive to observe how readily we yield assent to the language of the spectroscope (and of various other new instruments of investigation) concerning the operation of the most distant and recondite chemical forces. The position in a spectrum of a few colors in a ray of light from a fixed star, or from an incandescent gas, gives rise to well-defined *beliefs* concerning the chemical composition and physical condition of those distant or imponderable objects; and many of these beliefs now everywhere pass for sound doctrine. No chemist of the present time would circumscribe the field of attainable knowledge in his department by the limited analogies of the crucible. The old experimental chemistry was only the "schoolmaster" preparing the way for the newer and bolder methods now in vogue, and the broader generalizations of the present day.

## II. Astronomy.

8. Astronomy, like all other inductive sciences, has its moods and tenses. In the indicative mood and present tense it is a summary of observation.

Its facts comprise such phenomena as appear in the heavens. In astronomy, however, the present tense is not an instantaneous present; but it extends over the whole period during which observations have been made and recorded. (*a*) The first task to be performed with these observations is to separate the unessential elements, and to eliminate the personal and historical errors inevitable in any record of facts. (*b*) The next and most important step is to ascertain what these phenomena mean. To this end they are provisionally grouped together in a system. An hypothesis is formed concerning their mutual relations and influence. They are reduced to order. This reducing facts to order is what we in our ignorance call explaining them. An hypothesis, to be accepted, must really explain according to a just analogy the facts in hand. That is, the explication of the theory must comprehend the most significant facts, and not be inconsistent with any. (*c*) The third step in inductive reasoning is verification. The Newtonian theory of gravitation is supposed to be peculiarly fortunate in the extent to which it has been verified by *prediction*. If, however, we examine into the nature of scientific prediction it is readily seen that prophecy has a twofold meaning in science, as well as in Scripture, and that in both cases the popular meaning of the word is the less important of the two. The business of the



Hebrew prophet was not so much to foretell future events as to interpret the application of the law to present circumstances. So, in science, prediction relates rather to the unseen than to the future.

When Adams and Leverrier *predicted* the discovery of a planet in a certain position in the heavens, they did not say that it would be there, but that it was there, though yet unobserved. The Newtonian hypothesis is not verified by what is going to come to pass, but by what is. Newton reasoned that if his theory of gravitation were true, and if the reputed distance of the moon from the earth was correct, the moon constantly falls to the earth at the rate of fifteen feet a minute. After calculations had shown this to be approximately correct, a striking verification of the theory was afforded. Instead, however, of calling this prediction, it should be termed explication or deduction. The previous ignorance of the conformity between the fact and the calculation served simply to shield the mind from the errors of prepossession.

9. These are examples of the so-called "crucial test," which in all inductive sciences consists in deducing from an assumed hypothesis some particular thing which *should* appear, and then employing means to ascertain if it *does* appear. If any facts occur which do not correspond with the deductions the theory is incomplete, and must be

revised. The theory of gravitation has already endured so many searching crucial tests that it stands in little need of further verification. The presumption that it may yet explain the unsolved problems of astronomy is very great. By deduction from this theory Newton showed that the moon, as attracted by both the earth and the sun, ought to move with varying rates of velocity, — sometimes faster, sometimes slower. The deduction is confirmed by observation. Again, Newton argued that from the effect of gravitation upon large but confined bodies of water phenomena something like the tides must occur ; and there are the tides approximately corresponding in their movements to his deduction.<sup>1</sup> From his day to this analogous confirmations of the theory have been occurring. The theory continues to explain more and more of the phenomena.

10. But there is a widespread misapprehension concerning the extent to which the Newtonian theory has been verified in detail. In astronomy, as in every other science, what we know is as nothing when compared with what we do not know. The complete verification of Newton's theory is for two reasons impossible. First, from unavoidable errors of observation ; secondly, from the intricacy of the mathematical operations involved.

<sup>1</sup> See Jevon's *Principles of Science*, Vol. ii. p. 195.

No telescope or timepiece is perfect, and no human observer is infallible. During the last century numerous attempts were made to determine the parallax of some of the fixed stars. Many of these attempts were supposed at the time to be successful; but we now know that their results were altogether illusory, and represent not the parallax of the stars, but the imperfection of the instruments of precision in use, and of the methods of observation. In the astronomical tables of stellar parallax we find a column labelled "Probable Error," which in most cases is equal to one tenth of the whole amount. This means that the probable error in the estimation of the distance of the nearest fixed star is two million times a million miles. In regard to the distance of the sun from the earth astronomers are able to do a little better. But the recent language of Professor Newcomb on this point shows that when astronomy is called an exact science the expression is plainly hyperbolic. "Of the distance of the sun we may say, with a *reasonable approach* to certainty, that it is 92,000,000 miles and some fraction of another million; and if we should *guess* that fraction to be 400,000 we should probably be within 200,000 miles of the truth." <sup>1</sup>

It may be said that these probable errors in the data of astronomical science are relatively small

<sup>1</sup> Popular Astronomy (New York, 1st ed.), p. 200. [Italics ours.]

And they are, indeed, relatively small when considered in respect to what we have called the present tense of astronomy. But when regarded as elements from which to interpret an eternal scheme of natural operations they are not small. As a multiplicand they are insignificant. But when an indefinite multiplier is brought into the problem the product assumes important and even vast proportions.

11. Still further, not only are the data furnished by observation subject to correction for probable error, but the problems of the Newtonian hypothesis are essentially too complex to admit of exact solution. The question of how, under the law of gravitation, two bodies would act if they were alone in the universe is comparatively simple; but when a third body is added, complications of a serious nature at once arise. There were few mathematicians who could even understand Newton's solution of the problem of the mutual interaction of the sun, earth, and moon, considered by themselves. It is only by isolating the members of the solar system in groups of threes that anything at all can be done with the calculation of their mutual attractions. In comparing the actual with the theoretical inequalities in the motions of the planets, so as to verify the hypothesis in detail, a problem presents itself which is pronounced by the same eminent authority quoted above to be

“of such complexity that no complete and perfect solution has ever been found.” Each planet is constantly changing its position, and hence the force of its influence upon the others. “The geometer cannot strictly determine the motion of the planet until he knows the attraction of all the other planets on it ; and he cannot determine these without first knowing the position of the planet, — that is, without having solved his problem.”<sup>1</sup>

12. Nevertheless, the great mathematicians of the last half of the last century performed their work so skilfully, that the theory of how the planets *should* move corresponds with remarkable approximate exactness to the movements that have been actually seen within the short space of human history and accurate observation. But there are still some troublesome anomalies.

For example, the moon has of late been behaving quite unaccountably, and the theory of her motions is at the present time pronounced to be in a very “discouraging condition.” Her actual place in the heavens is now so different from her calculated place that a sailor would be misled by it as to his longitude five miles. This irregularity of the moon cannot with present light be *explained*. We can only get around the difficulty with a subsidiary hypothesis. Yet no one doubts that there is some explanation. Where so many greater irreg-

<sup>1</sup> Newcomb, Popular Astronomy, p. 94.

ularities *have* been explained, faith that this one *may* be is a legitimate exercise of mind.

Furthermore, the planet Mercury evidently feels some constraining power which until recently has eluded the search of astronomers. The motion of his perihelion is forty seconds in a century greater than it ought to be. It remains for the mathematician yet to calculate the sufficiency of the recently discovered intra-Mercurial planet to account for the observed irregularities.<sup>1</sup> Professor Newcomb's recent "tables of Uranus and Neptune already begin to differ from observation"; while the theories of Jupiter and Saturn are also both in need of revision.<sup>2</sup> The "labors of astronomers on the solar system" are by no means finished. To go no farther, the comets appear to be such uncertain wanderers that we never can tell exactly what they are going to do. Nor can any calculation be made of the ultimate influence upon the earth of the stars outside our solar system. The question whether there is a resisting medium in space to interfere with gravitation is also still open.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Since the above was written doubt has been cast upon the reality of this discovery, showing anew that eye-sight is not always to be trusted.

<sup>2</sup> Professor A. Hall, in "Nature" for March 27, 1879.

<sup>3</sup> A forcible presentation of some of these points is given by Professor C. M. Mead, in *Boston Lectures on Christianity and Scepticism*, for 1870.

13. It is evident, therefore, that the Newtonian hypothesis is an hypothesis still; and especially that to extend the law of gravity to those remote regions where the fixed stars dwell requires strong faith. It also calls for a great stretch of faith in the astronomer to foretell what will occur anywhere ten million years from now, or to say what did occur ten million years ago. The astronomer can predict no better than any one else what will happen on the astronomical morrow. He is as far as possible from having an adequate explanation of the things of infinite space or of infinite time. He cannot by inference fill up all space, nor completely unravel the web of secondary causation partially revealed in the present as the boundary and bond of the two eternities.

But notwithstanding the number of the unsolved problems of astronomy, those which have already approximately yielded their treasures are so complex and of such a nature that we may firmly hold as a doctrine of belief, that the law of gravitation pervades the physical universe; and may rationally expect that as our command of the elements in the problem increases we shall see more and more clearly the accordance of the theory with the observed facts.



### III. Geology.

14. Turning to geology we find numerous and pertinent illustrations of the nature and limits of inductive reasoning, in which the true character of scientific explanation and prediction is very clearly brought to light. Geology is a science of *past* forces, and speaks in the aorist tense. The geologist infers not what will be, but what has been. Leaving the facts of observation, he boldly ventures on the wings of the understanding into primeval times, and projects his lines of inferential knowledge far into the past eternity. The meaning of scientific prediction cannot here be misunderstood. It is explanation through explanation.

15. For a single example, let us bring forward in some detail the evidence supporting the glacial hypothesis. Almost everywhere, north of the fortieth parallel of latitude in the northern hemisphere the pebbles and boulders which abound are clearly not of local origin. In many cases it can be demonstrated that they have been transported from a northerly direction. It will be found, moreover, that almost universally, where the surface of the rocks is freshly uncovered, they are polished and grooved and scratched in a peculiar manner. The hard portions have been planed down to a level with the softer portions, and the striation is in all open regions tolerably uniform



in its direction, north and south. Furthermore, the contour of nearly all the smaller rocky eminences, and of many of the mountain masses, is peculiar. These are, as a rule, rounded off upon the northerly sides, and precipitous to the south. Over much of this region, and resting upon the striated surface of the rock, occurs what is familiarly called the hard pan,—a compact mass of finely comminuted material, with pebbles intermingled. These pebbles, like the underlying rock, are quite likely to be grooved and striated, the striae being in the direction of the longest diameter of the pebble. There are also peculiar lines of hills (composed of coarse boulders, compact clay, and gravel, and characterized by the frequent recurrence of bowl-shaped depressions) stretching for hundreds of miles across the country from east to west.<sup>1</sup> There are besides long lines of peculiar gravel ridges (with similar bowl-shaped depressions) extending from north to south, frequently continuous for more than a hundred miles, and constituting in some regions a parallel system at right angles to the line of hills just mentioned.

<sup>1</sup> One, first pointed out by Mr. Clarence King in 1876 (See Proceedings of Boston Society of Natural History, Vol. xix. p. 62), further explored through its whole length by Mr. Warren Upham (see American Journal of Science and Arts for August and September, 1879, and American Naturalist for the same months), extends from the extremity of Cape Cod, through Long Island, across New Jersey to the Delaware river.

Altogether, here is a combination of effects for whose production there is not now any adequate cause in existence.

16. But in certain places we find a cause in operation whose actual effects, upon a small scale, are like those we have observed to be so extensive. Ice moves slowly and in vast masses down the gentle declivities of mountains, and from continental areas in the direction of least resistance. The glaciers of the Alps and of Greenland are grinding down the surfaces of the valleys and plains over which they creep; for from the nature of the case, they must be polishing and striating the rocks beneath them. They are transporting boulders far away from their native home. They are heaping up before them vast masses of material called terminal moraines, and bearing long lines of stones upon their surface as lateral and medial moraines. Streams of turbid water pour forth from the foot of these ice currents.

In general explanation of the facts mentioned above, the hypothesis is propounded that in a cooler and moister period of the world's history (which may be supposed to have existed) these glaciers of Switzerland, of Scandinavia, and of Greenland extended far beyond their present limits, and produced a glaciation of the whole northern half of the northern hemisphere. This hypothesis of the distinguished Swiss naturalist

has now no rival worthy of mention, and is generally accepted as both essential and adequate.

17. If one asks why there is such readiness to believe the glacial theory of Agassiz, the proper reply is, that it explains the facts better than any other hypothesis can. Nor are we disturbed by the existence of problems which as yet it does not solve, unless the objector will assume the burden of proof, and show that these problems are absolutely incompatible with the theory. For, such progress has been made by that hypothesis in untangling the interesting puzzles of surface geology, that the presumption in favor of its further applicability is of the strongest kind. The explanation is already so complete that one might readily trust his life to the theory. If lost in the forests of Maine, the traveller might as confidently direct his course by the striae on the rocks or the direction of the gravel ridges, as by the magnetic needle in his pocket.

18. It remains further to inquire *how* this theory explains the facts mentioned. *The theory* is justified, first, by the fact that it rests upon an analogous cause about which something is known; and secondly, because a large proportion of the phenomena can be deduced from the operations of this cause, while none are altogether incompatible with such an origin. Thus a reasonable mode is found in which the observed facts may have been

brought about. If one still asks, why not suppose the Creator brought these things to pass without any such mode, he can only be thrown back upon a principle of belief resting on psychological evidence hereafter to be discussed; viz. that the Creator of such beings as we are, is wise and good, and would not utterly confound us by organizing nature into such an elaborate falsehood as it evidently would be if these marks were misleading.

19. The whole structure of geological science rests upon similar analogies. Belief in the recent extension of the glacial age is an inference from the disconnected facts of surface geology. That theory is a complete and simple explanation of these facts. Belief that a warmer climate than the present immediately preceded the rigors of the glacial period is likewise an inference resting upon the degree in which the supposition of such a climate explains the similarity between the fossil plants and animals of the tertiary deposits far to the north of us, and the living plants and animals now to the south of us. Belief that the "ripple marks" on sandstone were actually produced by water, is an inference from the similarity of the marks to those we know by observation to have been produced by water, or to what can be calculated from the known natures of sand and water. Belief that fossils indicate real life in the past, does not arise from having witnessed their resur-

rection, but rests solely upon a principle of final causes. The parts of the fossils are *adapted* to life, and are *similar* to what are now uniformly associated with life. In geology certainly there is well-grounded belief without either experiment or prediction.

#### IV. Botany.

20. At this point it may be worth while to cross the threshold of a kindred science to the foregoing and consider some other legitimate processes of reasoning in natural history. Classification in botany and zoölogy is more than a mere record of observations. Contrary to the common impression, it is a conspicuous example of inferential reasoning. In the process of classification a great number of observations are compared, and a *human judgment* formed concerning the closeness of similarity and the extent of dissimilarity. In every assignment of a particular form of vegetable or animal life to a specific position in a system, a judgment is formed concerning the relative importance or unimportance of its individual characteristics. Everywhere classification bears marks of human infirmity. The hard and fast lines of demarcation between species found in text-books do not exist in nature.

That all oak trees had a common origin is not a direct dictum of intuition, nor of observation,

but an *inference* from the explanation such a supposition gives to the close resemblance of one oak tree to another. If one chooses to assert that oaks and chestnuts (which in some of their species are almost inseparable) did not descend from a common progenitor, this too is a human judgment concerning the unimportance of the close gradation existing between the two forms; and furthermore is a negative inference touching the extent beyond which variation may not proceed even in unknown lapses of time, and under undetermined conditions of existence.

21. In this connection, and as illustrating the scientific methods of establishing an hypothesis, an interesting example is afforded by Mr. Darwin's aphorism, "Nature abhors perpetual close fertilization." In other words, cross-fertilization between plants of the same species is an end in nature, and is of advantage to the species. The proof is as follows: Among those species of plants called dioecious, the male flower belongs to a different individual plant from the female. Well-known examples are, among trees the willow and poplar,—among herbs, hemp and the hop. Cross-fertilization is in such cases necessary. Some external agency *must* carry the pollen of the sterile flowers to the stigma of the fertile plants. In the case of monoecious plants (in which the male and the female flowers are on the same stock, as in the oak, the

walnut, the pumpkin, and the cucumber), cross-fertilization, though not absolutely necessary, is *likely* to occur, and can hardly help occurring when the plants are near together. The wind blows where it lists, and we hear the sound of it, but cannot tell what it has gathered on its wings nor whither it will carry it; but in whatever direction it goes it will convey the pollen from the sterile to the fertile flowers which lie in its way. Moreover, the busy bee, as he seeks for wax and honey, does not limit his search to one and the same pumpkin-vine; thus in this case, and among all these plants whose showy flowers are visited by insects, cross-fertilization must occur. Furthermore, throughout a large class of plants (of which the Fleur-de-lis and the Orchids are typical), though the flowers are perfect, and both stamens and pistil are present, nature has taken elaborate pains to show, as a distinguished botanist has said, "how not to do it"; by preventing the pollen from reaching the stigma of the same flower. We will only allude to the facts that in some cases, the pistil and stamen are set back to back and recurved from one another;<sup>1</sup> in other cases the pistil projects so far that the pollen from its own stamens cannot reach it, and in others the stamens are long and the pistils short, and this reciprocally and in the same degree;<sup>2</sup> and again,

<sup>1</sup> Iris.

<sup>2</sup> Houstonia.



in the same flower the stigma develops first and fades before the stamens mature, and *vice versa*;<sup>1</sup> and still again, that delicate springs are set so as to throw a cloud of pollen into the air, yet not so as to throw it upon the stigma of its own flower, but upon the body of the insect which springs the trap;<sup>2</sup> or yet again, that other flowers are so arranged that the bee which crawls in after honey at one hole, must crawl out at another.<sup>3</sup>

22. The only reasonable clue yet suggested for the explanation of this striking class of facts is, that some advantage is secured to the species in its struggle for existence when the fertile flower of one plant is supplied with pollen from another plant. Such a theory rests upon a real analogy or true cause. Increased vigor in the plant would, of course, tend to preserve the species from being crowded out of existence by its competitors. The wide-spread existence of such contrivances as have been mentioned can hardly be assigned to any other cause. No other hypothesis clothes the facts with any adequate meaning; whereas, each newly discovered contrivance for cross-fertilization calls for the meaning assigned to it by this theory. Even more than the direct experiments to show the advantage of cross-fertilization, the coincidence of so many facts with the requirements of the hypothesis gives support to it. Indeed, upon such

<sup>1</sup> (a) Figwort; (b) Bellflower.   <sup>2</sup> Kalmia.   <sup>3</sup> Lady Slipper.



a point, indirect evidence may be more convincing than direct experiments (which also in this case are tending to confirm the theory), since in testing the hypothesis by experiment, other injurious circumstances than close inter-breeding may be unwittingly introduced, or the length of time required for the full results may not be at our disposal. But a satisfactory explanation of so complicated a class of phenomena as that involved in the facilities provided for cross-fertilization is the theory's own best evidence. Especially is this so, when, as in the present case, many of these contrivances have been discovered through use of the hypothesis in question.

It matters little that in a few cases, fertile seed is produced in nature where cross-fertilization is impossible, if it can be made probable that some other advantage is thereby gained for these particular plants. Such an amount of analogical evidence as supports this theory will endure a great deal of negative criticism, and it will take more than one exception to disprove the rule. An hypothesis which successfully threads its way through such a maze of facts as this, serving as a clew to lead us by natural steps from confusion to order,—from obscurity to light,—is as good as proved. The gardener may with confidence accept it, so far as it will go, as a guide in his particular department of labor.

23. Another example, illustrating the manner in which naturalists attack the problems presented to them, is worth considering in this connection.

About 1857, the extensive collections of plants made in Japan by botanists connected with the expeditions of Commodores Perry and Rogers, were placed in the hands of Professor Asa Gray. His attention was attracted by a remarkable degree of identity and special similarity between the species of Japan and those of the Atlantic basin of the United States, where climatic and oceanic barriers now absolutely forbid migration. Still further, the flora of the Eastern United States much more nearly resembles that of Japan, than that of either of these countries does the flora of Oregon and California. Out of three hundred species common to the temperate regions of Eastern Asia and the corresponding Atlantic region of North America, only one third is represented in Western North America.

Now the law of parsimony, as applied to botany and zoölogy, demands that the individuals of the same species should originally, in their ancestors, have dispersed from the same centre. This principle has been emphasized by Hugh Miller.<sup>1</sup> "If members of the same species may exist through *de novo* production, without hereditary relationship, so thoroughly, in consequence, does

<sup>1</sup> Footprints of the Creator, p. 255.

the fabric of geological reasoning fall to the ground that we find ourselves incapacitated from regarding even the bed of common cockle or mussel shells, which we find lying a few feet from the surface on our raised beaches, as of the existing creation at all. Nay, even the human remains of our moors may have belonged, if our principle of relationship in each species be not a true one, to some former creation, cut off from that to which we ourselves belong by a wide period of death. All palaeontological reasoning is at an end forever if identical species can originate in independent centres widely separated from each other by periods of time; and if they fail to originate in periods separated by time, how or why in centres separated by space?"

24. To explain (in consistency with the "law of continuity" assumed to pervade nature) the problem thus forced upon the attention of Dr. Gray, a threefold combination in the key was required. The following is the proposed solution. Geological evidence was produced by Heer and others, that the species under consideration, or others closely allied to them, had existed during the tertiary period in the regions clustering about the North Pole. Secondly, Agassiz and others had produced indubitable evidence that since the tertiary period a refrigeration of the northern part of the northern hemisphere had taken place,

which had caused an ice cap to extend as far south as the latitude of New York. Thirdly, there is the existence of a wide sweep of forces producing similarity of climate on the Eastern sides of the continents, and a contrast between that of the Eastern shores and that of the Western. From the combined action of these forces, the peculiarities in the distribution of plants over North-eastern Asia and North America can be easily explained. During the tertiary period, the natural progenitors of all the species under consideration existed in a region from which there was a road open to their present widely separated homes. The natural operation of the glacial period would be to drive these plants from the northern latitudes to more hospitable regions, till at length they would pause in their retreat in corresponding lower latitudes on either side of the Pacific Ocean. Thus we have the distribution and the similarity accounted for. Finally, the similar climates on the eastern sides of the continents, and the contrast between that of the eastern shores and the western, would bring into powerful action the law of the "survival of the fittest," — preserving similar species in Japan and on the Atlantic coast of America, while allowing a different class to maintain its foothold on the Pacific slope of the United States. The problem here presented is so complicated that a chance solution is out of the question; and the

explanation provided is so complete that its mere statement has been sufficient already to establish the hypothesis as a doctrine safe to be taught. The more numerous the anomalies it shall hereafter explain, the nearer will it approach to demonstration.<sup>1</sup>

### V. The Historical Sciences.

25. In the opinion of some the actions of the human will are incapable of scientific treatment. As a certain fictitious character is made to say that "anything might happen under the Plantagenets," so it is believed in certain quarters that human nature is capable of anything and everything, and that individual freedom vitiates all calculations either as to what man has done or what he will do. It is to be observed, however, that the range of individual action is extremely limited. The individual operates upon a course of nature, and is actuated by a limited set of desires. At the same time he is surrounded by other individuals, whose actions are equally independent. The resultant is a remarkable uniformity in all the general movements of society; and numerous cases arise in which we can so nearly eliminate

<sup>1</sup> Compare Professor Gray's paper in "Memoirs of American Academy" (1859), Vol. vi. pp. 377-452; also Presidential Address at Dubuque, 1872, reproduced in "Darwiniana." Further developed in American Journal of Science (1878, Vol. xvi. pp. 85-94, 183-196).

the effect of the spontaneous action of the will as safely to disregard it in our calculations. Relatively to the whole, in some cases this element of disturbance becomes infinitesimal, and may be dropped from the equation.

Pertinent illustrations of the principles already enunciated are so abundant in this department that we must content ourselves with one or two. In selecting them from the science of language we shall encounter the objection just referred to, that the idea of human liberty is incompatible with a scientific treatment of the subjects in which it is a factor. And, indeed, it must be confessed that philology would not be a science were there not metes and bounds to human spontaneity. But that human language is capable of scientific treatment appears in this that in no department of study have the methods of modern science won more signal triumphs over the unknown than in comparative philology.

26. Two of the most difficult problems presenting themselves for solution during the first half of this century were the deciphering of the hieroglyphics of Egypt and the translation of the cuneiform inscriptions of Nineveh and Babylon. We will briefly trace the steps by which the second of these problems was solved, and the interpretation of cuneiform inscriptions obtained.

M. Botta, French consul at Mosul from 1842 to

1845, while excavating the mound of Korsabad, near the site of ancient Nineveh, discovered upon the sculptured walls of the buried palaces a multitude of wedge-shaped inscriptions. In their translation a task was imposed upon scholars similar to that put by Nebuchadnezzar upon the magicians and soothsayers of Babylon in the interpretation of his dream. These were to interpret a dream they had never heard. Those were to translate a language they could not read. But for the clew preserved in certain trilingual inscriptions at Persepolis and Behistun in Persia, the literature of Assyria might have remained still an enigma. The interpretation of these inscriptions is one of the most brilliant literary feats on record.

27. At Persepolis there were a few short inscriptions ; but at Behistun more than a hundred lines of cuneiform characters, arranged in three clusters, had been preserved so far up on the precipitous side of a mountain (four hundred feet above the base) as to require a telescope for copying them. The first cluster was longer than the second, and the third shortest of all. In the few inscriptions of this character which had come under the notice of scholars at the beginning of this century, nothing was known concerning the vocal sounds represented by the combinations of wedges ; it was uncertain whether the lines were to be read



from left to right, as in English, or from right to left, as in Hebrew ; or, indeed, whether they were anything but ornamentation. On inspection, however, it was found that in general the wedges pointed to the right, and that in the third column the "characters were sometimes crowded together toward the right end of the line." From this it was conjectured that the reading was to be from left to right, and that words were not divided at the end of the line. It was furthermore conjectured that certain frequently recurring oblique wedges in the first class of inscriptions were designed to separate words. On closer examination Grotefend, as early as 1802, had concluded that a particular word at the beginning of the inscriptions at Persepolis, and "found always in a certain group of monuments, but replaced by another word in another group, must be a royal name."

28. As some of the buildings on which these words occurred were known to have been built by Cyrus or his successors, the natural inference was that their names were here preserved. On trial the verification was satisfactory. The situation of the letters common to Darius, Xerxes, and Hystaspes was as it should be where those names were supposed to occur. Thus a certain number of letters were ascertained, and the word for king, uniformly following these assumed proper names, could be read. By analogous processes Lassen



and Rawlinson, about 1840, succeeded in assigning a phonetic value to each of the thirty-nine or forty characters occurring in the first inscription at Behistun.

29. From the similarity of this ancient Persian language to the Zend and Sanscrit, it was easy to translate the first table of inscriptions. But the two other tables were still enigmas. These were conjectured to be translations of the first; and, since proper names would naturally be *transferred*, rather than translated, the frequent occurrence of these in the Persian tablet at once gave a clew to the phonetic value of the cuneiform characters in the other tablets. It was, however, soon apparent that the alphabet of the parallel inscriptions was far less complete than that of the first. Frequently the same character appeared to represent more than one sound; and sometimes different characters were employed for the same sound. In these respects there is some analogy with the English language, which has many more sounds than characters, and in whose alphabet different letters are frequently employed for the same sound; *c*, for example, being sounded as *k* in *cape*, *sh* in *gracious*, and as *s* in *place*; the ideograph *o* is likewise pronounced as zero, ciper, or ought, according to the fancy of the speaker.

30. To add still further to the difficulty, in the Assyrian cuneiform, "ideographs" were abundant.

As in the Egyptian hieroglyphics, so here, arbitrary combinations often represented an idea. But while in the Egyptian characters the idea was naturally suggested by the picture, in Assyrian there was no longer in the cuneiform characters any resemblance to the original pictorial representation. Furthermore, the Assyrian tongue was itself a conglomerate. The original language from which many of its elements were derived had long been dead. But many of its marks remained to puzzle interpreters, just as silent letters and the half dozen ways of pronouncing *ough* in English perplex a foreigner.

31. It would lead us away from the subject in hand to go further into particulars. The foregoing, however, is sufficient to justify the remark of Oppert, that frequently there was no way to determine the phonetic value of an Assyrian cuneiform character except to try all the hypothetical values, and take that which fitted best. But this is the sum and substance of the whole work of interpretation, even in tongues with which we are familiar. In deciphering the unknown Assyrian literature the difficulties of interpretation existed merely in an exaggerated form. Language is *never* absolutely fixed; and words *always* possess a large amount of elasticity. In the language of every day life, as well as in sacred literature, the letter killeth while the spirit maketh alive. Every

important word has numerous shades of meaning. To ascertain the designed import of a word in any given position is something more than a mechanical problem, and requires other labor than turning the leaves of the dictionary. The study of classic literature bids fair to maintain its place in educational systems, not only because of the nobleness of the subjects to which it introduces the student, but fully as much because the translation of an unknown tongue compels one at every step to consider and apply the true principles of inductive reasoning. The evidence upon which a particular shade of meaning is assigned to a word or phrase is not demonstrative, but probable; depending for its force upon a concurrence of indications, either one of which, and even all together, may *possibly* be inconclusive. Correctly to ascertain the turn of thought, regard must be had to the etymology of the word, to the ordinary use of the word at the period of writing (gathered from the literature of the time), to the general style of the writer, to the nature of the subject under discussion, to the views regarding it current at the time and place of writing, and to the general progress already made in art, science, politics, religion, and literature.

32. In proportion as the history of a period is complete, and the literature of a nation abundant, a strict construction can be given to the words and

phrases of a language. In the present case, however, it would be a mistake to attach the uncertainty still existing concerning many of the infrequent Assyrian ideographs to the characters in more common use. The fact that the assumed value of a phonetic character fits into the context in a great variety of circumstances is its own proof that the assumption is correct. The principle is the same whether we are deciphering a tongue unknown because the clew has been lost, or a cryptograph whose construction was designed to be obscure. The result of this method as applied to the cuneiform inscriptions unearched since 1845 from the ruins of Nineveh and Babylon is already seen in several volumes of historical, scientific, and legendary material, the general correctness of whose translation no one can doubt who adequately considers the subject. Although the whole process has been tentative and hypothetical, yet the facts which the hypothesis explains are so numerous and complicated that it now sustains itself as a balloon does in air, or a boat in water; and scholars are as little disturbed by the residual anomalies as astronomers are with those in their department. Where so much is clear the remaining obscurity serves rather to stimulate curiosity than to engender doubt.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In preparing this sketch use has been made of Sir H. C. Rawlinson's final "Report on the Cuneiform Inscriptions" in

33. But the philologist does not pause with ascertaining the thought consciously imparted to literary records by the writer. Language is in itself a historical monument, bearing in its very construction unconscious record of events which precede the dawn of written history. The grammatical forms of language are in great measure beyond the reach of the action of individual wills. In language, if not in manners, when one is with the Romans he must do nearly as the Romans do. He must use the language of those he addresses, or he cannot reach their minds with his thoughts. On this account the changes which take place in a language are, from the nature of the case, both superficial in character and gradual in the manner of their occurrence. Hence comparative philology has a legitimate field of inference beyond the mere collection of linguistic facts. Like the naturalist, the philologist infers genetic connection of language from certain classes and degrees of similarity; and not only this, but he can ascertain from the common rudimental elements in diverse languages, what was the state of science and art and religion and social life in the earlier prehistoric

Journal of Royal Asiatic Society, Vol. x. (1847); of Fergusson's "Palaces of Nineveh and Persepolis (Introductory Chapter); and of a valuable article in the Presbyterian Quarterly, (July, 1872) by Prof. William H. Green of Princeton. Dr. Selah Merrill has also lent his valuable personal aid.

race, from whose speech the later tongues have been derived.

34. For example, in absence of direct historical evidence, a comparison of the Sanskrit, Greek, Latin, Slavonic, Celtic, and Germanic languages reveals such similarity, not only in the sound of particular words, but in grammatical construction, that the explanation can only be found in the previous existence of a tongue, dead even in pre-historic times, of which these are the dialectic offspring. From the terms common to these so-called Aryan or Indo-European languages, whose independent existence can certainly be traced back to a period two thousand years B.C., a great amount of light is shed upon the unwritten history of those early ages. The words in these widely-separated languages (those who spoke Sanskrit in India, for instance, having had little intercourse with the other branches of the linguistic family since the period indicated) are essentially the same for ploughing, weaving, sewing, and for roads, ships, houses, the cow, the horse, the sheep, the dog, the bear, the wolf, the mouse, the fly; as are also the words for wool, hemp; for some of the metals, the sword, the spear, the bow and shield, together with those designating many political, social, and religious ideas.

35. The only natural and reasonable explanation of these facts is, that the languages containing

these common elements are derived from a tongue spoken by a common ancestral tribe which had advanced in civilization and arts far enough to be familiar with the several discoveries and institutions, a knowledge of which is implied in the use of the above terms. The strength of this inference regarding the consanguinity of the Indo-Germanic languages is increased by finding that the so-called Semitic tongues, of which Hebrew and Arabic are types, are interconnected among themselves in a similar manner. Whether, still farther back, the Semitic and Aryan tongues were united, is a question upon which there is even less tangible evidence than upon the famous question touching the derivative origin of species.

36. It is needless to detain the reader further in this connection, with details of the methods by which linguists verify their conclusions. Here, as elsewhere in scientific investigations, there are numerous false clues and accidental coincidences which deceive the unwary, and which down to the present century made comparative philology a butt of ridicule. The analogies which alone suffice to establish to modern students a genetic connection between different languages must be deep, as well as numerous. The evidence however increases in cogency as the adjustment becomes more complete and complicated.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For interesting details regarding the principles and conclusions



## VI. Textual Criticism.

37. Partly on account of its close connection with the latter portion of this treatise, we introduce a single other illustration of the methods of inductive reasoning, drawn from the science of textual criticism.

It is well known that we have not the original manuscripts of the New Testament. Probably none of the copies now accessible were in existence earlier than the fourth century of our era; and but two (the "Sinaiticus" and the "Vaticanus") would claim even so great an age. The number rapidly increases with each succeeding century. The task of determining from the agreements and variations of these second-hand documents what is the correct reading of the original is a science by itself; and both in interest and results is second to none.

38. The novice is usually at once astonished and dismayed when told that the number of variations which exist in the different extant copies of the New Testament is not less than 120,000. But when it is remembered that each copy was produced by hand the astonishment will cease. When, of comparative philology, see the Lectures of Professors Max Müller and W. D. Whitney upon the Science of Language; also the Articles of Rev. B. W. Dwight, on Indo-European Languages, in the *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Vol. xiv. pp. 753-769; xv. pp. 97-128; 401-444; xvi. pp. 673-722; xvii. pp. 266-302; 817-865, afterwards enlarged, and published in a separate volume.



also, it is noticed that a very large proportion of these variations "consists of differences of spelling, and isolated aberrations of scribes," the hope of arriving at definite knowledge of the true text does not seem so distant. The preponderance of authorities is so manifest that no appreciable uncertainty exists concerning more than two thousand cases, "even if we include in this questions of order, inflection, and orthography;" while "the doubtful readings by which the sense is in any way affected are very much fewer, and those of dogmatic importance can be easily numbered."<sup>1</sup>

39. Variations from the original may be supposed to have originated from one of two general causes, viz. accident and intention. The action of both of these causes can be partially traced and many of the errors eliminated through our knowledge of how the mind of the copyist would operate in certain conditions and under special influences. For example, the memory of the scribe would be likely occasionally to confound letters having nearly the same sound, or the repeated occurrence near together of the same combination of letters would cause the eye to skip a phrase or line; or, again, when the copyist was familiar with the order of words in one Gospel, he would sometimes unconsciously and incorrectly reproduce the same order in another Gospel. Of innocent and inten-

<sup>1</sup> See Smith's Biblical Dictionary, Art. "New Testament," § 30.

tional, though erroneous, alterations of the text, some would naturally originate through a desire of the scribe to make the language conform to usage in his own time, or to what he conceived to be a more correct grammatical form. Hence has arisen the rule that the "hardest reading" is most likely to be correct, since the tendency of the scribe would be to explain what was obscure, and to simplify what appeared confused.

Taking the oldest manuscripts as their basis, and guiding their investigations by a few principles like those just mentioned, New Testament critics have been able to eliminate the larger part of uncertainty concerning what were the apostolic originals. These conclusions are sustained (though sometimes corrected) and their general trustworthiness confirmed by the concurrent testimony of early translations, made before the date of the oldest extant manuscripts, and of the quotations occurring in early writings of such apologists as Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Clement of Alexandria, and of such commentators and homilists as Origen, Chrysostom, Jerome, and Augustine.

Scholars have ceased to mourn the loss of the original documents of the sacred writers; for though these might free us from the perplexity still remaining concerning a few passages, they would not materially increase the lawful assurance with which the rest of the text is received; and these

remaining perplexities are too insignificant in kind and quantity to affect the general questions at issue. Indeed the paradox may be accepted that scholars are more certain that they have the true text, than they would be if they had the original ; for it would be harder to prove the original to be genuine than it is now to prove what were the true contents of the original.

40. Since the evidences of Christianity themselves supply the best exemplification of the weight of circumstantial evidence in establishing general historical propositions, it is needless to adduce further illustrations at this point. They may be found ready-made in the standard works on anthropology and archaeology, in the records of all courts of law, in treatises upon government, upon military science, and upon medicine, and everywhere in the field of written history. It is desirable, however, continually to remind ourselves that properly the conclusions of inductive (and especially of that class called historical) sciences are not to be reasoned *about*. The security or insecurity of their foundations cannot be fully ascertained from an outside point of view. The prerogatives of an inductive science are only discerned by studying its subject-matter. Inspection and comparison combined constitute the only highway to rational belief and intelligent hope.

## CHAPTER IV.

### SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS.

1. ONE returns from every fresh survey of natural science impressed anew with the extent of its unexplored regions. Evidently there may be room for an infinite variety of operations of which no signs are manifest to our senses. The lowest musical tone consists of pulsations of air at the rate of about thirty per second; while it is estimated that the undulations of the cosmic ether producing green light are at the rate of 600,000,000,000,000 per second. Man's organization is not elastic enough to respond to all intervening vibrations. If our senses were ten times more numerous than they are and a hundred times more acute, the larger share of what goes on in the universe would still be unknown to the human race. From this it follows that wholesale negative criticism is usually both cheap and worthless. Nothing short of a logical contradiction is impossible; and the possible is so comprehensive, that it is little better than a blind guide to the actual. Man bases all his action on the *probable*.

2. A Greek philosopher is reported to have said

that "it is probable a great many improbable things will happen." This is pre-eminently true both as applied to remote periods of time and to distant regions of space; for, as the scope of human inference touching the course of nature is enlarged, its provisional character becomes more and more evident. None of the inductive sciences represent absolute knowledge of any large part of nature, either as extended in space or time. As we have seen, a considerable amount of uncertainty attaches to the operation of one's senses in observing natural phenomena. And beyond this, when the man of science becomes anything more than a mere observer and recorder of the facts of sensation, he in the very act enters a region of hypothesis where his most positive inferences fall short of absolute certainty.

3. Unfortunately, the English language has nearly lost the appropriate form of the subjunctive mode, in which the larger part of all scientific treatises are composed. Much misapprehension and embarrassment arises from this linguistic decadence. Often, on account of it, the provisional theories of scientific men are popularly supposed to be regarded by their authors as established truths; while, on the contrary, if one write on scientific subjects in the appropriate mode, his conclusions are in danger of being regarded as more problematical than they really are. Unwar-

ranted discredit has likewise been cast upon systematic theologians for the use they constantly make of hypotheses in order to reach practical conclusions. No charges against them are more frequently reiterated than that they are wise above what is written and cannot verify their dogmatic conclusions, — that for the strict letter of the word they are substituting theories of their own ; whereas, the assertion that the narrow, local, and literal meaning of the separate passages of a literary document exhausts its significance, is itself an arbitrary assumption. In all disputes between the literalists and the systematic school of interpreters, everything turns upon the *comparative* support which their theories receive from a due consideration of all attainable facts.

No one can fail to see that it is inconsistent in the devotees of those sciences which live and move and have their being by inferential knowledge, to mock at Christianity for making a virtue of their necessity. Nor may the defenders of Christianity be too incredulous regarding the conclusions of modern science, lest they also do violence to those common principles of reason in which all in the last resort must take refuge.

4. It is difficult to compare the evidences upon which distinct sciences rest.<sup>1</sup> For to a cer-

<sup>1</sup> Consult a valuable Article by Dr. Simon in *The Expositor* for Oct. 1878 ; also one by Prof. C. S. Pierce in *Popular Science Monthly* for Aug. 1878.

tain extent the arguments are, in the nature of the case, incommensurable. In each instance the method of verification must be determined by the nature of the subject in hand. The chemist, for example, verifies a limited number of things by experiment; for he may control the conditions, and can repeat them. The astronomer verifies by showing the approximate conformity of observed phenomena with results deduced from a theory by mathematical calculations. The geologist establishes his conclusions by projecting backwards the operation of known causes, and by his hypothesis accounting for the marks of analogous forces revealed in the solid portions of the earth's surface. The zoölogist and botanist prove community of species by exhibiting the closeness of resemblance between the individuals observed, and showing how little the divergence exceeds the range of variation in individuals known to be of common parentage. When we consider the great differences in the classes of phenomena upon which they are compelled to reason, it is not surprising that the astronomer should sometimes envy the chemist, and look with unjust suspicion upon the legitimate conclusions of the geologist; nor that all three should be unduly inclined to disregard the cogent reasoning of the zoölogist and philologist.

5. To speak in exact language, the *full* proof



of any scientific proposition is nothing less than the science itself, and cannot be *completely* appreciated except by those who have personally surveyed every nook and corner of the premises where the data are found. Hence, within certain limits, it is always hazardous for an outsider to affirm that an expert has more in his conclusion than is involved in his premises, since none but the expert fully knows what the premises are. There are no isolated facts. The significance of a fact lies in its relation to connected phenomena. These connections are likely to escape ordinary observers. The scientific results of an experiment, or of a tour of investigation, depend largely on the mental equipment of the investigator.

The difference between the knowledge of an expert and that of one who has never concentrated his attention for a long time upon a subject, is manifest enough in some cases. When, for example, a physician feels a patient's pulse, he learns more from that than an unskilled person could learn from feeling the patient all over. A great many important symptoms in sickness escape the observation of the untrained practitioner. The experienced physician interprets the single observed fact in the light of all his past reading, experience, and thought. So when a geologist examines a fossil in its place in the rock, or reads a description of it, he sees in a moment more of a

certain class of legitimate conclusions than an unprofessional observer could see after a year's continuous study.

6. But manifestly there is a natural limit to the authority of scientific experts. We must be on our guard against the evil tendencies of that division of labor made necessary by the modern enlargement of the boundaries of physical science. Experts are human, and may err in judgment, or be incapable of considering a subject from more than one point of view. From the nature of their occupations specialists are prone to think themselves monarchs not only of all they survey, but of the whole world besides. For example, an expert with the microscope can, without doubt, see a great deal more than most people when he looks through a fiftieth-inch objective; and if his knowledge of germs and of the forces of crystallization is extensive his observations may be still more valuable. But when, away from the microscope and the laboratory, and standing upon a platform, he begins to look with his mind's eye into the nebular fire-mist out of which the solar system is supposed to have been condensed, we may well begin to suspect his conclusions. He is evidently getting beyond physics, and is floating on a poorly guided craft in a sea of metaphysics. When a man in that mood thinks he discovers Socrates and Plato and Shakespeare

in process of slow segregation from the fire-mist, we may well pause and ask what that means ; and must conclude for one thing that he is out of his sphere, having vaulted into a region where he has no special information, and where a wise man shows his wisdom by acknowledging his ignorance.

But, as has been well said, “ there was no sense in abusing Laplace for his remark, ‘ I have no need of that hypothesis here,’ when he was asked why he did not postulate the existence of God in his ‘ *Mécanique Celeste*.’ His undertaking was to work out the mechanics of the universe from the known conditions of matter and force ;” and he might properly reply, if in the higher region of mental and moral philosophy one has not found God, he may well despair of finding him in astronomy. The religious teacher may rest in his theism till the astronomer brings forward a satisfactory explanation of the universe without God.

7. Again, it is clear that there may be a large amount of uncertainty touching subsidiary questions, without diminishing the probability of the main features of an hypothesis. It is a serious mistake, either to transfer to subsidiary questions the certainty of the main proposition, or to load the main question with the uncertainties of the subsidiary problems. This follows from the facts already mentioned, that, notwithstanding their

utmost efforts, the students of physical science succeed in interpreting but a small portion of that Nature they so diligently interrogate; and that, voluminous as is the literature of modern science, it would require a much larger library to record what is not known about the course of nature than to describe the portions already comprehended. In this respect, as has been said, the sacred Scripture resembles nature. It, too, seems exhaustless, and leads on every side to an outlying region of incomprehensible mysteries. It is in the darkness of these unknown regions that most of the conflicts between the would-be champions of science and of religion take place. But we are by no means bound to defend the logic of every scientific specialist, nor to accept as infallible every plausible interpretation of Scripture.

8. Since, in the nature of the case, there must always be some unexplored territory surrounding every field of scientific investigation, the limitations of human knowledge might well form a special department of study in theological seminaries and professional schools. For to learn the boundaries of the unknowable is a valuable addition to our real knowledge. "*Humanae sapientiae pars est quaedam aequo animo nescire velle.*" Humility is one of the noblest products of consummate science. And though it be true that "what we know is as nothing to what we know

not," this does not diminish either the value or the certainty of the knowledge we actually possess. In fact, the more limited the solid land we have to build upon the greater is its relative value. If there were but a single rushlight left to the bewildered explorer, the general darkness of the cavern could neither diminish the absolute brilliancy of that, nor obscure its apparent radiance; but on the contrary, the surrounding gloom would really enhance the value of the remaining ray by increasing its relative importance. "Action and not knowledge is man's destiny and duty in this life; and his highest principles, both in philosophy and in religion have reference to this end."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mansel, *Limits of Religious Thought*, p. 146.

PART II.

THEISM AND CHRISTIANITY





## CHAPTER I.

### PERSONALITY, WISDOM, AND BENEVOLENCE OF THE DEITY.

1. It will appear that the acceptance or rejection of the external evidences of a supernatural revelation depends largely, and properly, upon one's prior belief touching the existence, veracity, wisdom, and power of God as well as upon the internal character of the purported revelation. Bacon was not wholly wrong in affirming that "God never wrought miracles to convince atheism, because his ordinary works convince it."<sup>1</sup> For, unless nature already revealed God, miracles would be powerless to do so. Miracles furnish evidential ground for a supplement to the revelation found in nature. Christianity purports to be a second volume of the divine revelation, and presumes an acquaintance with the first.

2. The relation of natural theology to the direct evidences from which a miracle is inferred, is fairly stated by J. S. Mill.<sup>2</sup> "On the hypothesis of a God who made the world, and in making it

<sup>1</sup> Essay on Atheism.

<sup>2</sup> Essays on Religion, p. 215, 232.

had regard, however that regard may have been limited by other considerations, to the happiness of his sentient creatures, there is no antecedent improbability in the supposition that his concern for their good would continue, and that he might, once or oftener, give proof of it by communicating to them some knowledge of himself beyond what they were able to make out by their unassisted faculties, and some knowledge or precepts useful for guiding them through the difficulties of life." "Once admit a God, and the production by his direct volition of an effect which in any case owed its origin to his creative will, is no longer a purely arbitrary hypothesis to account for the fact, but must be reckoned with as a serious possibility."

3. Our duty, then, at this stage of the inquiry is to consider some general questions of natural theology, and to determine what we may know of God, independent of a supernatural revelation. To facilitate the argument this portion of the inquiry will proceed in the following order.

First. Evidence that the first cause is a person.

Second. Considerations leading us to believe that the Creator is supremely wise and good.

Third. Considerations bearing on the probability that the Creator would sometimes, though infrequently, supersede through miracles the established system of nature.

### I. The Personality of the First Cause.

4. The inference that God is a person rests upon a prior inference concerning the fact of design in nature. In this realm of speculation theism and atheism occupy the extreme points of opposition, — atheism denying the existence of design in nature altogether, while theism postulates design with regard both to the system as a whole, and to every part. Theism, however, is a genus. From it as a centre diverge in opposite directions deism and pantheism.

Deism appears to exalt unduly the importance of the mechanism of the universe. But in their views of the course of nature, the deists of the eighteenth century differ scarcely more from Protestant theologians of the present day (who accept the evidence for miracles only during two or three crises of history), than Protestants do from Roman Catholics, who are constantly on the lookout for miraculous confirmations of their faith in Christianity.

Whether pantheism allies itself with theism or its opposite, depends upon whether it is idealistic or materialistic (i.e. whether it seeks its unity in mind or in matter), and upon the rigor of its logic. In either of its extreme forms it would obliterate the whole idea of creation and personality, and practically amount to fatalism, if not to atheism.

Dualism maintains that both mind and matter are eternal and self-existent. It supposes a God, but sees no way of saving his benevolence except by denying his omnipotence. In this and the succeeding section it will come in place first to consider theism in its more general aspects, as contrasted with atheism and dualism, and then to inquire concerning the degree of definiteness our minds are warranted in giving to the theistic conception of the divine attributes.

5. At the outset a metaphysical objection must be considered. It is said that the conception of a personal First Cause involves a logical contradiction, since the assumed first cause of the universe needs to be accounted for as much as the universe itself. To this, however, it is only necessary to reply, that a personal First Cause is no more inconceivable than any other first cause; and it is evident that we must predicate self-existence and eternity of something. The only problem is, whether that something is personal or impersonal. The question now assumes this phase, Which is the more plausible supposition, that a self-existent and eternal *impersonal* force should have filled nature with utilities and adaptations, and should at last have evolved the personality of man; or that a self-existent personality should have planned and created nature? Even in regard to matter it is no harder to believe that

it has been created than to maintain its self-existence from eternity; for we know nothing of matter except its manifestations. Its revealed attributes do not, so far as we can see, involve the qualities of necessity and self-existence. Matter is changeable in its form, fugitive in its effects, and at best, is only known by man on the outside. Any theory of its ultimate composition leads to a profound mystery. It does not remove but multiplies the mystery, if with some modern physicists we invest the atom with all the natural qualities and capacities attributed by theists to the Deity himself.

6. The assumption of a self-existent, personal First Cause is an attempt to reduce the mystery of existence to its lowest terms; it is, therefore, scientific. If that assumption be rejected on account of its incomprehensibility, it becomes then necessary to accept a corresponding incomprehensibility in every separate mode of existence. There is no demonstrable absurdity in supposing matter to be a creation of mind. In order to show that it is absurd one would need to possess an exhaustive knowledge both of the properties of matter and of the capacities of mind. There is, therefore, nothing evident in the nature of the case to prevent our making the supposition that the First Cause of the universe is one, and personal. The ground is thus cleared for the positive argu-

ment drawn from the evidences of design in nature. We will first briefly state the argument, and then consider the objections and the counter arguments of atheism and scepticism.

7. It is needless here to do more than recapitulate the innumerable adaptations to purpose abounding in nature ; of which the correlations between man's mental wants and their supply are the most remarkable. The reader is referred to Paley's *Natural Theology*, to the *Bridgewater Treatises*, and to the numerous recent works on physiology, psychology, and natural history for whatever additional facts he may require. Nothing is plainer than that utilities and adaptations abound in the world, ranging in intricacy from the comparative simplicity of the solar system to the marvellous complexity of effects manifest in the union of mind and matter in man's own constitution.

8. It is well also to remark that this is not a question with which experts alone are qualified to deal ; since a very limited human experience provides all the essential data for the discussion. It is only the strangeness of new discoveries in nature which makes them wonderful. To live and move and have a being under human conditions and with human experiences is as marvellous a fact as any to which we can be introduced. Those mental experiences of the race which create a common bond of union between the different

members, and which break down all hard and fast lines of demarcation between the lowest and the highest, afford the proper material of all argument upon this subject.

Man has senses with which to perceive, fingers with which to work, and reasoning powers with which to elaborate the facts of sensation, and direct the skilful mechanism of the body, or to appropriate for use such properties of matter as are correlated to his wants. As a world within himself, man is no less wonderful than all he may perceive of external nature. The highest adaptation to purpose of which man is cognizant is the correlation between his own mental powers and their environment. He feels, he thinks, he desires, he wills, he retains the knowledge of the past, and upon it builds hopes which do not wholly disappoint him. In this correlation between his requirements and the means of gratification is an adaptation to purpose of which all men have knowledge. Thus each man's acquaintance with himself puts him in possession of the most important elements of the problem.

9. That there are adaptations to purpose no one can deny. The question is, How did these adaptations arise? What was their cause? Were these fitnesses, of which we make such constant and varied use, designed; or are they strictly fortuitous?



The theist predicates design, and for the best of reasons, since he has a just and adequate analogy on which to base his conception. Man himself is a designer. He modifies the course of nature. He uses tools and machinery, and accomplishes his designs through indirect means. In man as a designer we have a true cause, operating indeed on a small scale and within definite limits, but these limits are not such as would necessarily circumscribe a higher order of mind.

The inference by which we pass from the knowledge of our own designs to the conception of an omnipotent designer, may be compared (though at some risk of misunderstanding), to that by which from examination of present glaciers we arrive at the conviction that a continental ice-sheet really produced the phenomena of the so-called glacial period. Without some knowledge of the shrunken glaciers of the present period we should have had no data by which to interpret the past. But the discovery of these limited causes of similar phenomena furnishes a *vera causa* with which to work out the problem presented by greater analogous results. The question then is, How far is it legitimate in thought to expand the operation of the cause. *With* the analogy we can do something towards explaining the problem. *Without* the *VERA CAUSA*, we could explain nothing.

10. Now it devolves upon those who deny the

personal attributes of the first cause to produce some analogy valid equally with this adduced in support of theism, upon which to ground their hypothesis. But there is absolutely no solid starting-point for the atheistic hypothesis. The alternative to design is chance. But what evidence can there be that pure chance exists in the universe, even on the smallest scale. In order to prove that chance exists at all, the presence of design must be *disproved*; which involves the task of proving a universal negative. The absurdity of giving a dogmatic denial to design in nature was clearly perceived and emphatically expressed by Professor Huxley.<sup>1</sup> "The teleological and the mechanical views of nature are not necessarily mutually exclusive. On the contrary, the more purely a mechanist the speculator is . . . the more completely is he thereby at the mercy of the teleologist, who can always defy him to disprove that the primordial molecular arrangement was not intended to evolve the phenomena of the universe."

11. Even if, however, it should be granted that *some* things in the universe are fortuitous, it would seem that the necessary cumbrousness of the atheistic system ought to warn men of science against it. Since, though, for the sake of the argument, it should be admitted that some adaptations may happen, still the task of accounting in

<sup>1</sup> Critiques and Addresses, p. 305.

this manner for *all* the adaptations manifest in the system would grow with enormous rapidity at every step taken. It is common in this dilemma to seek an ally in unlimited time. But unfortunately time is only a multiplier, and when, as in this case, what we have to multiply is a principle of confusion, order cannot be the product. Furthermore, time is not unlimited except before and after. Time is only length. It furnishes only succession. It can only advance by arithmetical progression, while the improbabilities of unordained adaptations increase in geometrical ratio. With every repetition of a particular adaptation we have not only the improbability of its occurring once by chance, but that improbability multiplied by itself.

12. When, for example, we consider the probabilities that the sixty-four chemical elements should combine in an orderly manner, by chance, so as to produce a human body, the absurdity of the supposition is only exceeded by that of supposing they should do so a second and third time, and so on without limit in regular order. The following calculation will give a faint idea of how the improbabilities accumulate. There are fifty-two cards in a pack. The number of hands of thirteen cards each which can be produced is 635,013,559,600. ‘ But in whist four hands are simultaneously held, and the number of distinct deals becomes so

vast that it would require twenty-eight figures to express it. If the whole population of the world — say, one thousand million persons — were to deal cards, day and night, for a hundred million of years, they would not in that time have exhausted one hundred-thousandth part of the possible deals. Now, even with the same hands, the play may be almost infinitely varied, so that the complete variety of games which may exist is almost incalculably great. It is in the highest degree improbable that any one game of whist was ever exactly like another, except by intention.”<sup>1</sup>

When, furthermore, we think of the variety which might be produced from the original elements if combined in different numbers and proportions, and in higher orders of complexity, the conclusions are even more startling. We have, for example, twenty-six letters in our alphabet. From these we can by combination form several trillions of pronounceable words. From these words we can construct an indefinitely larger number of sentences. With these sentences we can fill an indefinitely larger number of books. And the variety of libraries that can be selected is indefinitely more numerous than that of the books that can be made. This last is what is called in mathematics, a combination of the fifth order. By combining two marks in all possible groups in

<sup>1</sup> Jevon's Principles of Science, Vol. i. p. 217.

similar ascending orders, the values would increase as follows :

First step, 2 ; next step, 4 ; third step, 16 ; fourth step, 65,536 ; fifth step, 65,536 *twos* multiplied together — a number “ so great that we could not possibly compute it ; the mere expression of the result requiring 19,729 places of figures. But go one step more, and we pass the bounds of all reason. The sixth order of the powers of two becomes so great that we could not even express the number of figures required in writing it down, without using about 19,729 figures for the purpose.”<sup>1</sup>

The fifth order of the powers of two is indefinitely greater than the number of molecules required to fill a globe extending to the stars of the sixteenth magnitude (that is with a radius of 33,900,000,000,000,000 miles), supposing the number of molecules in each cubic inch of solid or liquid substance to be  $3 \times 10^{26}$ .<sup>2</sup> The problem involved in undisguised atheism is to derive the uniformities by which we live and move and have our being, from generation to generation, from chance combinations when increased to infinite orders of the powers of infinity.<sup>3</sup> If a person deny design in the order and uniformity that reign about him, and which he makes the basis of

<sup>1</sup> Jevon's Principles of Science, Vol. i. p. 221.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., Vol. i. p. 222.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., Vol. ii. pp. 434, 435.

all his action, it is hardly worth while to reason with him, as Paley condescends to do, about the design manifest in a watch. Such condescension not improperly merits the charge of being the step from the sublime to the ridiculous. The uncertainties in science do not pertain to the question whether there is *a* design in nature, but to the very different question, How far is that design capable of interpretation by us, as to its ultimate and practical ends?

13. Even Mr. Mill could not resist the conclusion that the idea of design was not to be eliminated from nature. His own words are worthy of record.<sup>1</sup> “The particular combination of organic elements called the eye had, in every instance, a beginning in time, and must therefore have been brought together by a cause or causes. The number of instances is immeasurably greater than is, by the principles of inductive logic required for the exclusion of a random concurrence of independent causes, or speaking technically, for the elimination of chance. We are therefore warranted by the canons of induction in concluding that what brought all these elements together was some cause common to them all; and inasmuch as the elements agree in the single circumstance of conspiring to produce sight, there must be some connection by way of causation between the cause

<sup>1</sup> *Essays on Religion*, p. 171.

which brought those elements together and the fact of sight. . . . The natural sequel of the argument would be this : Sight, being a fact not precedent but subsequent to the putting together of the organic structure of the eye, can only be connected with the production of that structure in the character of a final, not an efficient cause ; that is, it is not sight itself, but an antecedent idea of it, that must be the efficient cause. But this at once marks the origin as proceeding from an intelligent will." In fact a pure atheist is a rare product ; and it is not strange that some — the Psalmist among them — question whether any who suppose themselves such are of a sound mind.

14. Some recent utterances of F. W. Newman<sup>1</sup> upon this subject, are worthy of repetition. "After stripping off all that goes beyond the mark of sober and cautious thought, there remain in this world fitnesses innumerable, on the largest and the smallest scale in which alike common sense and uncommon sense see design ; and the only mode of evading this belief is by carrying out the cumbersome Epicurean argument to a length of which Epicurus could not dream. We cannot *prove*, we are told, that the eye was intended to see, or the hand to grasp, and fingers to work delicately. Of course we cannot ; but what is the alternative ? to believe that it came about by blind chance ! No

<sup>1</sup> Contemporary Review (Oct. 1878), p. 484.



science has any calculus or apparatus to decide between the two theories. Common sense, not science, has to decide ; and the most accomplished physical student has in the decision no advantage whatever over a simple but thoughtful man. Cicero, . . . mastered thoroughly the whole Epicurean system, as his Epicurean friend Atticus confessed, as also we see in his Dialogues ; but he avows that he would as soon believe that the Iliad of Homer was written by shaking letters together in a bag as that this universe arose out of blind chance."

## II. Evolution needs Proof, and is harmless.

15. Nor does the idea of evolution, so much in vogue in these days, relieve atheism of its difficulties ; since the law of evolution, if it exists universally, must be both proved and accounted for. The extent and limits of its operation must be ascertained through the regular methods of induction, viz. observation, interpretation, and verification. Evidently, such proof can extend but a very short distance into the unseen, without making use of assumptions which are as metaphysical as those of the ordinary natural theology, and far less capable of substantiation. Furthermore, if evolution should be considered as proved, the establishment of the doctrine, while modifying, and to some extent enlarging, the interpretation of design in

nature, would in no sense interfere with the doctrine of a Designer. It could only give us an enlarged conception of his wisdom and power. Evolution is a *mode*, and not a *force*. "Natural selection is not the wind which propels the vessel, but the rudder which, by friction, now on this side and now on that, shapes the course. . . . Variation answers to the wind," and "is not a product of, but a response to, the environment."<sup>1</sup> Variation, environment, and adaptation must each, and all together, be accounted for. Very naturally Mr. Ruskin<sup>2</sup> was disappointed upon going to Mr. Darwin's account of the laws of life which regulate the local distribution of color in the peacock's feather; since he went there in quest of the wrong idea. He says he was informed only "that peacock's have grown to be peacocks out of brown pheasants, because the young feminine brown pheasants like fine feathers." Whereupon, he said to himself: "Then either there was a distinct species of brown pheasants originally born with a taste for fine feathers; and therefore, with remarkable eyes in their heads, — which would be a much more wonderful distinction of species than being born with remarkable eyes in their tails, — or else all pheasants would have been peacocks by this time;" and troubled himself no more about the Darwinian theory.

<sup>1</sup> Darwiniana, p. 386.

<sup>2</sup> "The Eagle's Nest," p. 156.

How little Mr. Darwin's theory was supposed by its author to encroach upon the true theistic field of argument is seen in his own remarks upon this same point.<sup>1</sup> "He who admits that the male [of the Argus pheasant] was created as he now exists, must admit that the great plumes which prevent the wings from being used for flight, and which, as well as the primary feathers, are displayed in a manner quite peculiar to this one species during the act of courtship, and at no other time, were given to him as an ornament. If so, he must likewise admit that the female was created and endowed with the capacity of appreciating such ornaments. I differ only in the conviction that the male Argus pheasant acquired his beauty gradually, through the females having preferred during many generations the more highly ornamented males; the aesthetic capacity of the females having been advanced through exercise or habit in the same manner as our own taste is gradually improved."

According to Professor Huxley,<sup>2</sup> Mr. Darwin has even "rendered a most remarkable service to philosophical thought by enabling the student of nature to recognize to their fullest extent those adaptations to purpose which are so striking in the

<sup>1</sup> *Descent of Man* (1st ed.), Vol. i. p. 383.

<sup>2</sup> *Lay Sermons* (4th ed.), p. 303. See also *Miscellanies*, by J. C. Smith, D.D.; 5th Essay on Evolution and a Personal Creator, pp. 173-223; also Janet's *Final Causes*.

organic world, and which teleology has done good service in keeping before our minds, without being false to the fundamental principles of a scientific conception of the universe.”

16. Of the many pertinent illustrations of this point by Professor Asa Gray,<sup>1</sup> we can only allude to the supposed extension of Paley's theistic argument from the watch, so promptly furnished by him on the appearance of the theory. “What,” he asks, “is to hinder Mr. Darwin from giving Paley's argument a further *a fortiori* extension to the supposed case of a watch which sometimes produces better watches, and contrivances adapted to successive conditions, and so at length turns out a chronometer, a town clock, or a series of organisms of the same type.”

The closing chapter of the volume from which this quotation is taken, is so convincing that its force will not be wholly lost even in a summary.

17. So far also is this naturalist from sharing the fears of many (and J. S. Mill<sup>2</sup> among others), lest the establishment of the Darwinistic principle of “natural selection” as a guiding force in the development of organic beings, will be destructive of the argument from design, that he styles his concluding Essay, “Evolutionary Teleology,” and

<sup>1</sup> Darwiniana, p. 57. See also the numerous passages referred to in the index of the same work, under “Design,” “God,” “Teleology,” “Theism,” etc.

<sup>2</sup> Essays on Religion, p. 172.

contends that "in Darwinism usefulness and purpose come to the front again as working principles of the first order ;" and that "upon them, indeed, the whole system rests."<sup>1</sup> The old theistic argument from design was becoming more and more burdened with objections, arising from a false conception of the manner in which the Creator was supposed to execute his design. By a natural confusion of thought, marks of design were regarded also as "proofs of a direct execution of the contriver's purpose in the creation of each organ and organism, as it were, in the manner man contrives and puts together a machine."<sup>2</sup> But by enlarging the conception of the design, and, as in the Copernican system of astronomy, substituting the idea of an indirect method of accomplishing the results, not only do the difficulties disappear, but the "most puzzling things of all to the old-school teleologists are the *principia* of the Darwinian."<sup>3</sup>

18. The apparent waste in nature (as of pollen in pine trees, and of seeds generally), and the existence of rudimentary and abortive organs, become intelligible marks of design when once we cease to insist on the "immutability and isolated creation of species."<sup>4</sup> Abortive and rudimentary organs, which are so abundant in nature, may indicate service done in the past, or service to be

<sup>1</sup> Darwiniana, p. 357.

<sup>2</sup> p. 357.

<sup>3</sup> p. 378.

<sup>4</sup> p. 375.

done in the future.<sup>1</sup> Superabundance of pollen, and of seed-germs generally, serves as the basis on which that struggle for existence is possible, which is the progressive force.<sup>2</sup> "Without the competing multitude, no struggle for life; and without this, no natural selection and survival of the fittest, no continuous adaptation to changing circumstances, no diversification and improvement, leading from lower up to higher and nobler forms." Under this conception much that seems waste in nature may be reckoned as playing the part of reserved forces in an army, making promptitude of action possible on fitting occasions.

"They also serve who only stand and wait."

The discovery of general laws through which utilities and adaptations are brought about, may enhance to any degree our conception of the Creator's power, wisdom, and skill; but it can in no way diminish the evidence of design which those utilities and adaptations furnish.

19. Rather, as Whewell justly remarks: "We are, by the discovery of the general laws of nature, led into a scene of wider design, of deeper contrivances, of more comprehensive adjustments. Final causes, if they appear driven further from us by such extension of our views, embrace us only with a vaster and more majestic circuit. Instead of a few threads connecting some detached

<sup>1</sup> Darwiniana, p. 375.

<sup>2</sup> p. 378.

objects, they become a stupendous network which is wound round and round the universal frame of things." "Our conviction that the artist works intelligently is not destroyed, though it may be modified and transferred, when we obtain a sight of his tools. Our discovery of laws cannot contradict our persuasion of ends."<sup>1</sup>

20. As Canon Mozley has shown,<sup>2</sup> it is a mistake to class Bacon among the disbelievers in the doctrine of final causes. Bacon protested against the extravagant, hasty, and careless application of the doctrine, so prevalent during the Middle Ages. The doctrine, however, has not been superseded by modern discoveries, but only "*educated*." "It would appear from modern discovery that creative design was more distant and circuitous than the design of the human artificer in constructing a machine; was in less immediate contact with the result, and of earlier date in scheme; that it acted on a larger scale by bringing things together from different and distant quarters, and by the use of contingent materials whose place in the plan was only seen by the light of the end. . . . But creative design is not obscured on these accounts, but only appears the more subtle, powerful, and grand."

21. It should be observed here, that the theist is not called upon to *demonstrate* design in every

<sup>1</sup> Philosophy of the Inductive Sciences (London, 1840), Vol. ii. pp. 88-94.

<sup>2</sup> Bampton Lectures, Note 5 to Lecture vii. p. 253.



portion of nature. This only omniscience could do. But, for the purposes of the theistic argument, it is sufficient if we show that many difficulties may actually be removed from this mode of conception, and that none are demonstrably insuperable.

The pervasiveness of design in nature is an inference of such a character that it is impossible to circumscribe it; and if well started, it logically extends itself until positive limits are shown to exist. The burden of proof falls with crushing weight upon those who deny design in nature; since all must grant that we are too limited in knowledge to criticise the universe in its entirety. Many things which seem to us casual results may well enough prove to be integral portions of an unexplored design. The orbit on which the designing force is moving towards its object may be too broad for us to calculate its curve from our short and imperfect observation.

22. Hence, "it need not much trouble us that we are incapable of drawing clear lines of demarcation between mere utilities, contingent adaptations, and designed contrivances in nature; for we are in much the same condition as respects human affairs and those of lower animals. What results are comprehended in a plan, and what are incidental, is often more than we can determine in matters open to observation. And in plans ex-

ecuted mediately or indirectly, and for ends comprehensive and far-reaching, many purposed steps must appear to us incidental or meaningless. But the higher the intelligence the more fully will the incidents enter into the plan, and the more universal and interconnected may the ends be. Trite as the remark is, it would seem still needful to insist that the failure of a finite being to compass the designs of an infinite mind should not invalidate its conclusions respecting proximate ends which he can understand. It is just as in physical science, where, as our knowledge and grasp increase, and happy discoveries are made, wider generalizations are formed, which commonly comprehend rather than destroy the earlier and partial ones." "Design in nature is distinguished from that in human affairs—as it fittingly should be—by all-comprehensiveness and system. Its theological synonyme is Providence. Its application in particular is surrounded by similar insoluble difficulties; nevertheless both are bound up in theism."<sup>1</sup>

23. In the nature of the case different lines of design are liable to interfere with one another, as two sound-waves may be so combined as to counteract each other and produce silence. It may involve a contradiction of thought that every portion of a finite creation should be equally important.

<sup>1</sup> Darwiniana, pp. 379–381.

But the chips from the sculptor's chisel served a purpose in holding together and preserving the material upon which his art displayed its power. The waste necessary to a plan is not pure waste.

### III. Continuity of Nature and Design.

24. Nature is properly enough supposed to be (and by inductive methods is probably proved to be) a system of causally-connected sequences. This conception first came conspicuously to light in the theory of gravitation; and the philosophical speculations rife in Newton's time concerning the bearing of that theory upon religious belief were very like those now perplexing the defenders of Christian thought. The doctrine of continuity was involved in the maxim, "action and reaction are equal." At the present time many other forces besides gravitation are brought into the circle. Heat, light, electricity, chemical action, and muscular exertion are found to be capable of mutual transmutation. There is even no manifest thought without phosphorus and oxygen, any more than there is flying without atmosphere and wings.

25. But the advocate either of design or of free-will need not quarrel with the doctrine of the conservation of force, since the universe of mind and matter may, for all we can show to

the contrary, interpenetrate each other without conflict or contradiction. The real point of difficulty is, that the doctrine of continuity implies that there is no room for any addition to the energy of nature. But it may be plausibly argued that the *collocation* of forces to manifest a design is not the addition of a force but of an *idea*. The forces of nature are capable of any number of combinations, like the letters of the alphabet. As no new letters need be created to express a new thought, so there need be no addition to the *forces* of nature to produce a new impression, but only a fresh combination of them. When the engine-driver determines to move the valve of his engine one way in preference to the other he adds no physical force to the causes in operation. But for that determination the engine might have moved in a contrary direction, or have dissipated its energy in various ways.

26. An ingenious author<sup>1</sup> thus puts the case: "The sway of natural law, or the rule that every event has a natural cause or causes, does not exclude the action of the human *will* in some cases, as a force producing a new resultant. At the command of Jehu 'two or three eunuchs' threw Jezebel out of a window. As the body descended, a philosopher might have remarked that the line

<sup>1</sup> "Darwinism and Design; or, Creation by Evolution." By George St. Clair, pp. 3 and 4. London. 1873.

of its motion was a parabolic curve, and the velocity of descent constantly accelerated — sixteen feet in the first second, forty-eight feet in the next, and so on, in obedience to the law of gravity. The curvature of the line would show that, besides gravity, there was a projectile force, which if it were traced to the muscles of the eunuch's arms would by no means bring one to the end of the inquiry. The motion of the muscles resulted from heat liberated by the oxidation of the muscles themselves, and previously stored up in the arm through the food taken into the stomach. The food grew in the shape of sheep and corn; the sheep were dependent upon grass; the corn and grass depended on rain and sunshine; the rain itself was raised in vapor from the sea through the action of the sun's rays — the source of all the motion is in the sun, and the current of successively dependent natural events from that source downwards is unbroken. Unbroken but *diverted*, new-directed, for at some point the stream of events was touched by the volition of the eunuchs, and the after-flow was such as Jehu desired and the eunuchs determined. Certainly, as Professor Huxley says, our volition counts for something as a condition of the course of events, — a truth which can be verified experimentally as often as we like to try, and therefore one of the highest truths. . . . It seems a fair inference from this,

that the continued necessary evolution of new states and events from those which preceded is not of itself a disproof of the existence of a Will superior to man's, and 'counting for' more than man's, as a condition of events that fall out."

27. To use the comparison of a French physicist,<sup>1</sup> the will may be like an engineer who "having to construct a canal along the summit of a hill, may at all points of that singular course distribute at pleasure the water of the canal into the one or the other of the two adjacent valleys, without having to make it deviate from its natural tendencies." Thus the action of a designing will presents no theoretical difficulty not involved in what is "familiar to geometers under the name of *singular solutions*, also sometimes spoken of as *Poisson's paradox*."

Or to use another less evident illustration,<sup>2</sup> "It is a principle of mechanics that a force acting at right angles to the direction in which a body is moving does no work, although it may continually and continuously alter the direction in which the body moves. No power, no energy, is required to deflect a bullet from its path, provided the deflecting force acts always at right angles to that path." This is the paradox really presented

<sup>1</sup> M. Boussinesq, quoted by Paul Janét in *Contemporary Review*, Vol. xxxii. pp. 445-456.

<sup>2</sup> *North British Review* for March 1868. Quoted and criticised by Professors Stewart and Tait in "Unseen Universe," p. 180.

in the action of the centripetal and centrifugal forces imagined to produce the elliptical motions of the solar system.

28. Thorough-going fatalism is the only theory which excludes miracles and providence from the universe. But the modern doctrine of the continuity of nature is by no means identical with this. On the contrary, the results actually produced in nature are many of them in the highest degree contingent. Nature abounds in examples of the unstable equilibrium of forces. It is, as we say, in the highest degree plastic, if we only know the way to its secret stores of energy. Knowledge, if not power, is the road to power. The thought of the inventor enters into all the machines constructed after his model. The thought of the workman produces an effect every time he directs muscular energy. Even the great meteorological forces of the world respond to the directing agency of man. A statesman *says* to an improvident people, "plant and nurture trees on a barren waste." At his *word* it is done; and eventually the winds and clouds obey the behest and respond in refreshing showers.

29. Miracles, providence, and the acts of free-will belong, by analogy, to the same class of facts.<sup>1</sup> None suppose a break in the continuity of nature. But each presumes the addition of design in a

<sup>1</sup> See Mozley's *Bampton Lectures* for 1865, pp. 5-8.



more or less manifest and striking form, collocating for a purpose the forces of nature, without disarranging them. It is a matter of indifference to the torrent whether it flow to the right or to the left ; but it is by no means indifferent to the inhabitants of the valley. On one side it may fertilize, on the other overwhelm. In miracle and providence the Creator is only supposed to use a power over nature analogous to that so freely exercised by man. The use of nature for purposes of the Creator's design is no more a paradox than its use by man. For the evidences of such an original disposition, and such subsequent modifications of nature as shall serve the highest moral ends of the human race we must wait till the later stages of the discussion.

#### IV. Omnipotence.

30. Theistic writers usually ascribe OMNIPOTENCE to the Creator. But, between atheism (which denies design *in toto*) and theism (which asserts it in every part) there is, in the opinion of some, a middle ground occupied by *Dualism* ;—a term capable of including all theories which agree in assuming the independent and eternal existence of matter, or, as it is sometimes vaguely expressed, of an evil principle which limits the benevolence of the good principle. We will not take it upon us to denominate this view an absurdity, nor need

we brand it as atheism. But the advantage of it as a subsidiary hypothesis has manifestly been over-estimated by some recent philosophers. For it would seem apparent that if one admits any design at all in nature he might as well admit it in the whole, since every enlargement of the supposed sphere of discernible design strengthens the argument for *pervasive* design by enlarging our positive knowledge of the foundation on which the analogy is based.

31. Nevertheless, there is truth which we are bound to consider in Mr. Mill's<sup>1</sup> remark, that "the necessity for contrivance is a consequence of the limitation of power." "Wisdom and contrivance are shown in overcoming difficulties, and there is no room for them in a being for whom no difficulties exist."

Mr. Mill's *Essays on Religion* from which this quotation is made, having been published after his death, did not have the benefit of that careful revision which he bestowed upon most of his writings. Otherwise it would not have been possible for him to forget how completely in his review of Hamilton and Mansel<sup>2</sup> on the *Philosophy of the Conditioned*, he had answered beforehand his own objections to the doctrine of the divine om-

<sup>1</sup> *Essays on Religion*, p. 177 ; see also p. 112 sq.

<sup>2</sup> See *Examination of Sir William Hamilton's Philosophy*, Vol. i. chaps. i-vii.

nipotence. In that discussion Mr. Mill shows plainly enough that it is not necessary to suppose matter to be eternal in order to provide difficulties for divine wisdom. There are *impossibilities* in abundance besetting the execution of any particular plan of benevolence. The choice of one plan is the rejection of all other plans. It is not a part of the excellency of the divine nature that it is free from the law of logical contradiction. We are not compelled, with Hegel, to regard the absence of evil in God as an imperfection. It is absurd to speak of an infinite (or of any other) being as possessing contradictory attributes. The attributes of the same being may be *complementary*, but not *contradictory*. The law of right choice is the same with God as with man; but the benevolence of the Creator is exercised amid circumstances of which we have a very inadequate knowledge.

32. Hence the difficulty of criticizing the ways of the Lord. Our standard of holiness may be the same as his; while our capacities of knowledge are infinitely inferior. As Mr. Mill himself has said,<sup>1</sup> "One who sincerely believes in an absolutely good Ruler of the world is not warranted in disbelieving any act ascribed to him merely because the very small part of its circumstances which we can possibly know does not sufficiently justify it."

<sup>1</sup> Examination of Hamilton, Vol. i. p. 131.

Had this eminent author's acquaintance with theological systems been as extensive as with the subjects about which he ordinarily wrote, he would have seen that the generally received theistic conception of the universe has not ignored the paradox that there are difficulties even to omnipotence. But from the ordinary theistic point of view the limitations to the Creator are regarded as *logical*, and are *incorporated into the meaning of the word omnipotent*. In his definition, the theologian limits omnipotence to the accomplishment of those objects which are within the range of power. A logical contradiction is not such an object.

33. It is no heterodox limitation of divine power to affirm that it cannot make a thing to be and not to be at the same time and place. Yet this logical necessity imposes conditions upon an omnipotent Creator. The Creator is not at liberty to make a thing, and then govern it as though it were something else than he has made it. Creation in itself logically involves the idea of voluntary self-limitation on the part of the Creator. In the act of creation the self-existent being sets apart a portion of existence as sacred ground. When he has made it dependent in one way, he cannot destroy its dependence without destroying the ground of its existence.

34. In human affairs it would not be derog-

atory to a man's power and wisdom to say that he could not directly use a crowbar or a trip-hammer to mend a watch. If the instrument were large enough to admit of mending with such tools, it might be a time-piece, but it would not be a watch. So, as a matter of course, if the powers of vegetable life have been imparted to an organism, all the conditions necessarily entering into the conception of such an organism must be maintained while it continues; otherwise omnipotence would not be at liberty to create such an individuality. Antecedent to creation, we may suppose that an indefinite number of plans were open to the Creator; but the actual choice of one system involved the rejection of so much of every rival system as is inconsistent with the conditions of the one chosen. God's creative wisdom is displayed in selecting the best system; his power appears in securing the ends for which the system chosen properly exists. It does not call in question the power of the Creator to assert that when he has made man a rational soul, he cannot properly govern him except by rational motives. It is not within the province of omnipotence to endow men with patience before the trial of their faith, nor to control man as a social being while utterly disregarding those characteristics which constitute him such. Man cannot be made to enjoy the pleasures of temperance and intemperance at the same time.

35. That these logical limitations exist, both in moral and material things, is forcibly stated by a writer already quoted.<sup>1</sup> “ While we have not, and cannot have, any proof that God’s power has *no* limits, the very epithet ‘wise,’ which the instinct of all religious hearts has applied to him, implies that it has strict limits. To absolute power there are no difficulties, and no field for the exercise of wisdom, whose task is simply to overcome difficulties. If it be asked, *what* difficulties may be imagined? one obvious reply is, to reconcile the maintenance of strict unchangeable laws of nature and the free-will of man with the general well-being of the world. . . . Again, although our most modern mathematicians torture our intellects by talking about a new (algebraic) world which has four dimensions, instead of the traditional three which we call length, breadth, and thickness, most persons will acquiesce in the belief that our well-known SPACE, and all its properties, which we term geometry, inhere in the nature of things as strictly and primitively as the Divine Being himself, so that geometry contains a series of *conditions* under which he works; conditions which limit possibility, and give an ampler sphere for wisdom.”

#### V. The Wisdom and Benevolence of the Creator.

36. The grounds upon which (notwithstanding the limitations of our knowledge) we believe that

<sup>1</sup> F. W. Newman, in *Contemporary Review* (Oct. 1878), p. 490.

God is good, are somewhat different from those upon which we credit his power and wisdom. If, however, we regard the divine being as personal, it is for several reasons extremely difficult (if not impossible), to reject belief in his *supreme* goodness.

In the first place, there would seem to be no motive, either positive or negative, for the Supreme Being to be anything but benevolent; since his benevolence would be of supreme value to himself as well as to his creatures; and its absence an incalculable evil, and must be discerned as such by him with absolute clearness of apprehension.

In the second place, man has sufficient experience of the adaptation of nature to his own wants to furnish a secure starting-point from which to elaborate, from the actual creation, the doctrine of divine benevolence.

37. For, however much we magnify the ills of life, and the severities of nature, there undoubtedly is, even as J. S. Mill <sup>1</sup> confesses, “a preponderance of evidence that the Creator desired [both] the *approval* and the *pleasure* of his creatures.” The existence of a moral nature in man implies the first, his unwillingness to part with life implies the second. The exceptions among men who commit suicide may be accounted for from a dis-

<sup>1</sup> Essays on Religion, p. 191. Italics ours.



arrangement of the faculties arising as an incident in the bestowment upon the race of the exalted powers of human nature. Still the objections to the doctrine of God's benevolence are some of them such as merit special attention in this discussion. Indeed, the remainder of this treatise is, in one aspect of the case, an inductive argument in proof of divine benevolence, since Christianity supplies that supplement to natural forces which the exalted nature of man, coupled with the hazard of his situation and the straitness of his circumstances, prepares us to expect. The defence of supernatural religion rests in part upon the principle that congruity between supply and demand ought to characterize the products of wisdom. On the hypothesis of the Creator's supreme benevolence, the natural supply of opportunity to man does not correspond to the greatness of his wants. According to Christianity, a supernatural interference supplies the natural lack, and remedies the apparent incongruity between man's endowments and condition.

38. We fail to discern any sound sense in Hume's<sup>1</sup> oracular assertion that, "As the works of nature have a much greater analogy to the effects of *our* art and contrivance than to those of *our* benevolence and justice, we have reason to infer that the natural attributes of the Deity have

<sup>1</sup> Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion. Part xii.

a greater resemblance to those of men than his moral attributes have to human virtues." For if God is benevolent, all nature is a part of that divine "art and contrivance" through which the objects of his benevolence are attained. The wisdom of a contrivance, however, can never be estimated without understanding the end for which it exists. If the highest idea to be realized in the world were the production of animals of vast size, that was best attained during the Mesozoic age of geologic history, when the earth swarmed with reptiles almost as formidable in the names now given them as in their reality.

39. In a system of art and contrivance, ends necessarily leave their impress upon the means. That is what constitutes art. Art is the material expression of an idea. Hence, we cannot properly criticise the works either of God or man till we know what these works are for. A man, for example, who was raising fat cattle for the market might naturally enough err in judging the method of his neighbor who was training a horse for the race-course. The fat which is useful for a beef creature is an incumbrance to the race-horse. In this case, one object is more ideal than the other, though perhaps not more noble. The wisdom of an engineer who is surveying for a canal, should be judged by the sum of the ends which the canal is to serve, and by the nature of the obstacles

to be overcome. If the sole object were navigation, and the level were unbroken, and the cities all lay in a straight line, the shortest course in space would be the most direct means to the objects in view. But if other objects were super-added (making the end more complex), the direct line to the purpose would not be the simplest one in space, but a curve of greater or less complexity. For example, if the cities to be connected by a canal did not lie in a straight line; if irrigation as well as transportation were an object; if hills intervened, and if old water-courses were in part available, it is manifest that the end would be a resultant involving a variety of ideas, both positive and negative, which would all impress themselves on any wise plan. In the arts of sculpture and painting it is so plain as to go without saying, that a sculptor in carving a statue must have regard to the height of the pedestal upon which it is to stand; and a painter in frescoing the walls of a temple must study the harmony of the whole interior.

40. In the case of the Creator's works we have the supposition of the highest and most comprehensive end united with the highest conceivable power of accomplishment. The complexity of the means is correlated in the hypothesis with the comprehensiveness of the end. Those theologians who make benevolence the sum of virtue maintain, as a corollary to the doctrine of divine benev-

olence, that the object of the creation was to secure the highest attainable amount of virtue and happiness. Taking into account the omniscience of the Creator, the exhaustive definition of the final cause of any particular thing found to exist is *the sum of all the uses which it is ever to serve.*

41. Thus, in the discussion of final causes, we are naturally brought to consider the meaning of, and warrant for, the famous *law of parsimony*, so much in use since the days of Leibnitz, and known from the fourteenth century as “Occam’s razor.”<sup>1</sup> This maxim has been variously stated. Its essence is contained in the following expressions: “A plurality of principles is not to be assumed when the phenomena can be explained by one.” “Assign no other causes than suffice to account for the phenomena.” “Nature knows no waste.” As regards natural causes it is condensed in the modern phrase “continuity of nature.” As regards final causes Leibnitz employed it under the philosophical conception of “the sufficient reason.”

42. This maxim is the clew by which nature is interpreted, both in its teaching as to physical causes, and as to design. The worth of the clew is established by the result. The right key is the one that fits the lock and opens the door. If a

<sup>1</sup> Entia non sunt multiplicanda praeter necessitatem. Substances are not to be multiplied without necessity.

certain key to cipher despatches gives an intelligible reading, it is probably the right one. If it yields a congruous interpretation to the whole message, and to a series of despatches, it will be taken as the true one. But it is evident at a glance that *in using the law of parsimony, both sides of the equation must be considered.* The terms on one side must have their correlatives on the other. The equation of cause and effect is one in which (supposing sufficient knowledge), we may pass in both directions. We may infer the ends from the means, and the means from the ends. We may study the effects beforehand in the causes, or the causes in the effects.

43. "The scheme of nature," says Mr. Mill,<sup>1</sup> "regarded in its whole extent, cannot have had for its sole or even principal object, the good of human or other sentient beings." But how can that conclusion be established until we are sure we have an adequate view of what the highest good "of human and other sentient beings" is, and until we know the full extent of the application to the matter in hand of the law of logical contradiction. What is the highest good "of human and other sentient beings"? That is one question. What are the appropriate means to attain that good? is the other. Neither can be considered by itself. No one can deny that evil

<sup>1</sup> *Essays on Religion*, p. 65.

exists in the world. But the question is, Is its relation to the universe that of incidental correlation, or of direct intention?

44. The theological schemes for harmonizing the existence of evil with the doctrine of divine benevolence are favored with relief from three sources. First, they emphasize the superior worth of virtue, and the conceivable value of that discipline which evokes and confirms it in man and kindred beings. Second, they insist upon the legitimacy of applying the law of logical contradiction, even to the action of the Creator when he brings into being and governs finite existences. If God had made jelly-fish only, he might govern them by simple arrangements; but as jelly-fish they possess only a low order of well-being to be subserved, and the method of their government is a matter of small concern. If he creates a higher order of being, the wisdom of that act involves in itself the necessity of prescribing other means of control, and higher conditions of development. Thirdly, the theologian is at liberty to defend divine benevolence, by presenting the evidences of a future life, of a supernatural revelation concerning that life, and of the probationary character of this life. To that evidence we shall presently apply ourselves according to the methods of inductive logic, presenting first in this connection the considerations which may remove the

seeming incongruity, which in the opinion of some inevitably pertains to any system of miraculous interposition of the Creator.

45. It was Hume again, who said,<sup>1</sup> "All things in the universe are evidently of a piece. Everything is adjusted to everything. One design prevails throughout the whole; and this uniformity leads the mind to acknowledge one author; because the conception of different authors, without any distinction of attributes or operations, serves only to give perplexity to the imagination without bestowing any satisfaction on the understanding." Now if this be the case, and if it be not unreasonable to regard the universe as a product of supreme wisdom, the discovery of remarkable ends, would properly go far to prepare the way for belief in remarkable means. And on the other hand, in a system alleging the employment of extraordinary means, it would be necessary to consider whether the ends proposed were of a correspondingly exalted character. When, for instance, the multitude flocked to the wilderness to hear the preaching of John the Baptist, it was correctly inferred that they did not go to see either "a reed shaken with the wind," or "a man clothed in soft raiment." Only the supposed presence of a prophet of the Lord would be sufficient attraction to account for such a movement of the people.<sup>2</sup> On the other

<sup>1</sup> The Natural History of Religion. Section ii. <sup>2</sup> Matt. xi. 7.



hand, when a daughter of Abraham has been in bondage to Satan eighteen years, her release from sickness is an object of sufficient importance to justify the Saviour in a grave departure from the literal precept of the Sabbath law.<sup>1</sup>

46. In the same manner the believer in Christian miracles may diminish the antecedent improbability against those particular miracles, by observing how exalted are the objects for which they are supposed to have occurred.

The fact should here be kept in view, that the Christian apologist defends a system involving miraculous interferences with the course of nature. At the same time it must be confessed that contemporary reports of such interferences in our own time, together with the accounts of mediaeval miracles, are justly regarded with such suspicion as to render them well-nigh incredible. This, however, is largely owing to the glaring apparent disparity between the means employed and the ends supposed. As a means of accomplishing transitory ends, the machinery of a miraculous intervention with nature is entirely out of proportion. Where only such objects are accomplished we exclaim with the Latin poet :

“Parturiunt montes, nascetur ridiculus mus.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Luke xiii. 15, 16.

<sup>2</sup> “The mountains labored with prodigious throes,  
And lo ! a mouse, ridiculous arose.” — HORACE.

47. For it is manifest that belief in the stability of the ordinary course of nature is one of our most valuable possessions. In our instincts and powers we are adjusted to a tolerably stable course of nature. It is no matter in what order this correlation has arisen, whether by a slow process of development the instincts of our species have adapted themselves to the course of nature through the guidance of natural selection; or whether man and nature were adapted by a more direct fiat of the Creator. The adaptation exists, and is an element which wisdom must now take into account in its present dealings with us. In view of the behests of wisdom we may safely say that by the law of parsimony there must be a supernatural reason for a supernatural interference with the course of nature. The personal benefit to a lame man of walking, or the personal advantage secured to the wisest and best of the race by a temporary prolongation of life are trivial outcomes for a miracle. It is as credentials of a divine message to a needy race of men that miracles become congruous, and thus conform to the law of parsimony. In such a case it may be made to appear that there is no manifest and misleading waste of power in a miraculous intervention.

48. It might, indeed, be presumptuous to propose a mathematical demonstration of the congruity of the Christian system with the character of

God and the wants of the universe. But it may not be difficult to show that man possesses capacities so vast, and desires so transcendent, that the natural supplies of knowledge, and of the other means of well-being, are insufficient. In that case a supernatural revelation is a corollary to our belief in the goodness and wisdom of the Creator. For on principles of wisdom the existence of a manifest want is a pledge of an appropriate supply. Everything in the argument will then depend on our ability to tell what are the greatest wants, and what is the *appropriate* supply.

49. The doctrines of theism being assumed, the conditions of the problem are clearly stated by J. S. Mill.<sup>1</sup> Hume's argument against miracles is far from being conclusive "when the existence of a Being who created the present order of nature, and, therefore may well be thought to have power to modify it, is accepted as a fact, or even as a probability resting on independent evidence. . . The question then changes its character, and the decision of it must now rest upon what is known, or reasonably surmised, as to the manner of God's government of the universe; whether this knowledge or surmise makes it the more probable supposition that the event was brought about by the agencies by which his government is ordinarily carried on, or that it is the result of a special and

<sup>1</sup> *Essays on Religion*, p. 232.

extraordinary interposition of his will in supersession of those ordinary agencies.”

50. It is our part now to consider the natural powers and situation of man with a more particular view to the third preliminary inquiry, viz. What is the probability that the Creator would supplement his revelation of himself to man in nature, by a miraculous interposition? We need pay little attention to those who dogmatically affirm that miracles are *impossible*. For even if that were the fact, nothing short of omniscience could safely venture to declare it. The bare possibility of the Creator's personality puts us in position to consider the positive evidence adduced in favor of providence and miracles. So that even if we were in the sad dilemma of those<sup>1</sup> who are somewhat sceptical as to God's existence, but a little more sceptical as to his *non-existence*, we should still not be wholly debarred from proceeding with our argument.

51. But as convinced theists we approach the subject of miracles with the presumption that, if needed, God has pledged himself to their performance. As we have before remarked, miracles and providence are *species* under a common *genus*. We should have the same warrant to expect miracles in certain occasional conjunctions of circumstances involving the greatest human need, that

See Mill's *Essays on Religion*, p. 242.

we have to expect, in the more frequent distresses into which we are plunged, answers to appropriate prayer. A miracle differs from an ordinary providential disposition of events, mainly in its magnitude and in the special character of its object. If miracles occurred frequently or regularly they would cease to be miraculous, and would lose their value. A part of the value of a miracle, as of gold, consists in its scarcity ; it is precious.

52. There is no need to trouble ourselves in this connection with purely metaphysical difficulties. It is no more difficult to comprehend the relation of divine agency to providence and miracles, than to the ordinary course of nature. As theists we cannot doubt that such order as there is in the universe is the result of creative design. The variations from the "course of nature," are simply the result of superimposed design, after the analogy of the designs added to the system by man himself. We may conceive of God as producing a miraculous effect, directly at the instant of delivering his message, as a man makes a gesture to emphasize a word ; or, with that greater degree of independence of time which (it may be supposed) is characteristic of supreme wisdom, we may conceive that a variation from nature should be so *timed* in the plan as to accompany and accredit a divine message. In one case we should **have a miracle of power** ; in the other a **miracle**

of foresight. The important element in the miracle is, that it plainly evinces superhuman and supernatural control and knowledge of the system in which it occurs, and so may accredit a supernatural doctrine.<sup>1</sup> “The greatest marvel or interruption of the order of nature occurring by itself, as the very consequence of being connected with nothing, proves nothing; but if it takes place in connection with the word or act of a person, that coincidence proves design in the marvel, and makes it a miracle.”<sup>2</sup> The proof of miracles is therefore analogous to the proof of general design in nature, and in part consists of remarkable coincidences between different classes of facts. It is not of primary importance to determine the point at which divine power comes into contact with the chain of natural causation, since the extraordinary character of the coincidence is proof in itself of the extraordinary agency producing it, and of the special design entering into it. The tree is known to be supernatural by the supernatural character of its fruit.

53. In *all* reasoning upon matters involving design, we base our expectations upon our belief in a law of congruity — a phrase which expresses the idea that throughout the Creator’s work, wisdom is as pervasive in its adaptations as cause is

<sup>1</sup> See Babbage’s “Ninth Bridgewater Treatise.”

<sup>2</sup> See Mozley’s first Bampton Lecture, pp. 6–8.

in its connections. In interpreting the facts of Christianity this so-called law of parsimony is as useful as in reasoning upon the facts of natural history, and is no more likely to mislead. Hence, theology may have as good a basis as physical science; and it is as legitimate to inquire concerning design in the works of God as concerning the principles of order pervading the causally connected sequences. We may properly hope to enlarge our knowledge both of cause and design by reasoning on the facts of experience and observation. For, facts look forward as well as backward, and carry the impress of their object as well as of their origin, and the interpretation of cause cannot in any case be separated from the assumption of design.<sup>1</sup>

54. In concluding this chapter, it is proper to remark upon the futility of objecting to the general doctrines of theism on the ground that they are *anthropomorphic*, i.e. that they endow the Creator with human attributes and affections.

<sup>1</sup> For a fuller discussion of these and kindred topics, see articles by the author in the *New Englander* for Oct. 1871, and in the *Bibliotheca Sacra* for April and Oct. 1877 and Jan. 1880. The subject of Miracles is very ably treated by J. H. [Cardinal] Newman in his two celebrated Essays. The second Essay on Ecclesiastical Miracles is largely an *argumentum ad hominem* against the Protestant view, and maintains, as we have done in the earlier part of this treatise, that the Catholic in his views concerning the antecedent probability of miracles is as much separated from the Protestant as the Protestant is from the Deist. See second Essay, §§ 67, 68, and 109.



For, since we are human, if we are to speak at all upon these subjects, we can do no otherwise than speak after the manner of men. The question is, whether we shall speak as wise men or as foolish. In attributing personality, wisdom, and benevolence to the Deity we but adopt the rational and scientific method of employing, for purposes of explanation, the clearest analogy revealed in our own experience. To abandon this vantage-ground is to turn, in our quest for light, from darkness to total darkness, and to attempt an explanation of the somewhat obscure by that which is superlatively so. It would be wise in comparison for the astronomer to discard his telescope, or the geologist his knowledge of the present forces actually modifying the surface of the earth.

By a natural transition we may proceed in the following chapter to inquire concerning the relative greatness of man as a constituent of the known universe, that we may form some idea of his attracting power in a system of benevolent design.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE CONGRUITY OF MIRACLES IN THE CHRISTIAN SYSTEM.

1. WE may freely concede that ordinarily there is "a vast preponderance of probability against a miracle." To counterbalance this would, as Mill remarks,<sup>1</sup> "require a very extraordinary and indisputable congruity in the supposed miracle and its circumstances with something which we conceive ourselves to know, or to have grounds for believing, with regard to the divine attributes." He should have added, *or with regard to the situation of man*. The discussion is not now concerning the *power* of God, but concerning the *wisdom* of an alleged particular miraculous intervention. What is the occasion for miracles? and how are the alleged miracles of Christianity justified by the results? When these questions are answered the way will be clear to consider the direct evidence for the truthfulness of the history upon which Christianity reposes. It is at first a question of the relative dignity of human nature.

<sup>1</sup> *Essays on Religion*, p. 235.

2. Bishop Butler began his celebrated defence of the Christian religion with a somewhat needless argument to show that *possibly* the human soul is immortal.<sup>1</sup> For his negative purposes at that stage of the argument, the bare possibility of a future life was sufficient. Using that as an hypothesis merely, he proceeded to show that there was no demonstrable incongruity in the Christian system. The real positive argument for immortality is not found however in the bishop's introductory chapter, but unconsciously appears at a later stage, in the success with which, by the use of that idea, he is able to harmonize the facts of nature with those of revelation.<sup>2</sup> For our present purpose it is necessary to put the argument for immortality in a more positive form.

3. Even though, with Locke,<sup>3</sup> we should admit that it is "not much more remote from our comprehension to conceive that God can, if he pleases, superadd to matter a faculty of thinking, than that he should superadd to it another substance with a faculty of thinking"; and though it may not be "of such mighty necessity to determine one way

<sup>1</sup> The Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed, to the Constitution and Course of Nature. Part i. chap. 1.

<sup>2</sup> See Professor George I. Chace, LL.D., in *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Vol. vi. (Feb. 1849), pp. 48-75.

<sup>3</sup> Essay Concerning the Human Understanding. Book iv. chap. 3, sec. 6. The subject is discussed at greater length in his *Correspondence with the Bishop of Worcester*.

or the other, as some over-zealous for or against the immateriality of the soul have been forward to make the world believe"; still it is, even according to him, "past controversy that we have in us something that thinks; our very doubts about what it is, confirm the certainty of its being, though we must content ourselves in the ignorance of what kind of being it is."

4. With perfect confidence it can be maintained that the soul of man is not matter in its commonly accepted definition; and to use language in such a loose sense as would admit of classing matter and mind together well-nigh destroys its value as an aid to thought. To the common apprehension it seems evident that thought and the qualities of matter have nothing in common. In the sonorous words of Johnson, "to be round or square, to be solid or fluid, to be great or little, to be moved slowly or swiftly one way or another, are modes of material existence, all equally alien from the nature of cogitation."<sup>1</sup> Or, to adopt the pointed paragraph of another, we are sure that "the antithesis [between thought and extension] is of God's own making, and no wit of man can undo it."<sup>2</sup> In the language of another, the mind "distinguishes its own actings, states, and pro-

<sup>1</sup> *Rasselas*, p. 201.

<sup>2</sup> Prof. John Fiske. See also *Outlines of Cosmic Philosophy* Vol. ii. pp. 432-451.

ducts, and even itself, from the material substance with which it is most intimately connected.”<sup>1</sup>

The mental powers in their highest states of activity certainly, are not altogether dependent on matter. Memory, imagination, reflection, religious emotion, the sense of obligation, the consciousness of personal identity, and innumerable other mental activities can none of them be conceived of as qualities of matter. “Between [such] thought and the physical phenomena of matter there is not only no analogy, but there is no conceivable analogy.”<sup>2</sup> The soul of man is more than an ordinary product of material organization. It is a *regal power*, and its qualities are not merely the harmony of a harp. The lordly, though limited independence of the mind, in its use of the body, was convincingly illustrated by Plato, through reference to the power we have to resist hunger and fatigue and heat, and to “utter sounds contrary to the tension, relaxation, vibration, or any other affection to which the component parts of the body are subject.”

5. “What ruling principle is there of human things other than the soul, and especially the wise soul? Do you know of any?” asked Socrates.

“Indeed, I do not, replied the disciple.”

<sup>1</sup> President Noah Porter in “Human Intellect,” p. 23.

<sup>2</sup> Professor G. J. Allman, M.D., in Presidential Address before the British Association, August 1879.

“And is the soul in agreement with the affections of the body? or is she at variance with them? For example, when the body is hot and thirsty, does not the soul [sometimes] incline us against drinking? and when the body is hungry, against eating? And this is only one instance out of ten thousand of the opposition of the soul to the things of the body.”

“Very true.”

“But we have already acknowledged that the soul, being a harmony, can never utter a note at variance with the tensions and relaxations and vibrations and other affections of the strings out of which she is composed; she can only follow, she cannot lead them.”

“Yes, he said, we acknowledge that certainly.”

“And yet do we not now discover the soul to be doing the exact opposite — leading the elements of which she is believed to be composed; almost always opposing and coercing them in all sorts of ways throughout life, sometimes more violently with the pains of medicine and gymnastic; then, again, more gently; threatening and also reprimanding the desires, passions, fears, as if talking to a thing which is not herself, as Homer in the *Odyssey* represents Odysseus doing in the words:

‘He beat his breast, and thus reproached his heart:  
Endure my heart; far worse hast thou endured!’

Do you think that Homer could have written this

under the idea that the soul is a harmony capable of being led by the affections of the body, and not rather of a nature which leads and masters them ; and herself a far diviner thing than any harmony ? ”

“ Yes, Socrates, I quite agree to that. ”

“ Then, my friend, we can never be right in saying that the soul is a harmony ; for that would clearly contradict the divine Homer as well as ourselves. ”

“ True, he said. ” <sup>1</sup>

6. The evidences of the nobility of man's endowments are not hid away in a corner, but lie upon the surface of history, and in the direct field of his consciousness. Man's powers of reflection raise him far above the sphere of mere sensation. Modern science with all its marvellous achievements is the creature of that reflection. Observation plays only a subordinate part. Man's reasoning powers elaborate from the simple facts of sensation vast systems of thought. The astronomer sees the different and changing positions of the heavenly bodies, and *thinks out* a system of astronomy. The chemist observes the effect of mingling certain elements together and *discovers* by reflection a law of chemical affinity. The geologist collects fossils from various situations near the surface of the earth and mentally constructs a

<sup>1</sup> Phaedo, Sect. 94 (Jowett's Translation).



theory of their sequence. The inventor discovers the invisible power of electricity, and conceives and executes the idea of covering both land and sea with a network of electric nerves, through which, by arbitrary signs, thought is instantaneously transmitted from one side of the globe to the other. Thus by his thought man partially annihilates space.

7. Through language also he overcomes time, and bursts the barriers of personal isolation. Wherever man is found he has a complicated and highly artificial language, through which to transmit the product of his reflection, experience, and imagination to other individuals and to succeeding generations. He stamps his thought on the fleeting sounds of the voice, and upon the order and character of his vocal utterances. From earliest ages he records his history in emblematic monuments, and through use of an artificial alphabet.

8. In poetry and in the fine arts man rises to the loftiest conceptions of ideal excellence. The poet enriches the world with thoughts transcending the ordinary measure of language. By well-directed use of trope and simile and figure and rhythm, he mounts into a region of noblest feelings and grandest aspirations. The painter, the sculptor, the architect, the musician, and the orator come also to the aid of the idealizing faculty of the human mind. The architect crowns the hill

tops and adorns the valleys with structures symbolic of man's higher destiny. The sculptor and the painter beautify these temples with lovely forms and exquisite colors; and their walls resound with the eloquence of the orator and with the sweet melody of the singer, and the majestic rhythm and intelligible harmony of the chorus and the orchestra. Through appeal to the noble sentiment of patriotism, the statesman spreads over vast regions the subtile influence of political organization, and the soldier leads his comrades to risk their lives in behalf of their country's honor, and cheerfully to offer themselves to death amid the sublime emotions of the battle-field. In all these forms of activity man is an intelligent creator and designer.

9. But the existence of the moral law, revealed in man's perception of obligation and in his admiration of virtue, is his crowning glory. Every man carries about with him a sense of responsibility. He is aware that he carves his own character. He admires a right choice wherever he discovers it, and however imperfectly it may be executed in the external world. Virtue is to him beautiful in itself; but it shines with a light cognizable only to a nature of most delicate organization and of the highest powers of generalization; yet, so exalted is human nature that in its lowest state, no man can avoid agreeing with the great German phi-

losopher,<sup>1</sup> that “ a good will is good, not through that which it accomplishes or attains, nor through its fitness for attaining any object set before it, but solely through the volition, i.e. in itself ; and, considered for itself, it is beyond comparison more highly to be prized than all which can ever be brought to pass through it to the satisfaction of any possible inclination, or, if you will, the sum of all inclinations. Though through some peculiar unpropitiousness of fate, or through scanty endowment from unkind nature, this will should altogether lack the means for carrying out its purpose ; though by its greatest effort nothing should be accomplished, and there should remain only the good will (plainly not a mere empty wish, but the summoning of all means as far as they are in our power), even then would it, like a jewel, shine for itself, as something which has its full worth in itself.”

The mental faculty which discerns the beauty of a right choice is called the conscience, and everywhere enforces upon man the obligation so to exercise his voluntary powers that the moral beauty of which Kant so eloquently speaks shall belong to the soul. Conscience is an ever-present force in human nature. It slumbers not except

<sup>1</sup> Immanuel Kant, “ Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten und Kritik Der Praktischen Vernunft ” (Leipzig, 1838), Vol. viii. p. 12.

when man sleeps. It creates an unfailing demand for some kind of religion. Religious belief is so nearly universal among men, and is so peculiar to man, that some naturalists have characterized him in their systems of classifications as a "religious animal." No offense need be taken with this classification, if only we consider how noble in themselves the religious instincts and emotions are. They indicate a nature which is fettered by the conditions of its present existence, and point to a higher state of existence in which the imperfect fruition of this life may come to perfection amid more favorable circumstances.

10. But it is not altogether because the world is niggardly that man is so little satisfied with its bounties. The reason of man's dissatisfaction with temporal good is rather to be sought in the greatness of his capacities and the unlimited character of his desires. The supplies of nature fail because the demands of man are so great. Without religious faith he is an oak-tree planted in a flower-pot. With only physical truth to feed upon, the best that nature affords him is as swine's food to the prodigal son. With only this world as a sphere of hope and calculation, man is a prisoner, even though in a palace. Without the religious aspirations which ground themselves in a confident hope of immortality, man in his best state is in a miserable condition. For with all that science and

art can do for him, he is still a pilgrim and stranger in the earth. He is the sport of accident ; the victim of disease ; the plaything of the elements, and liable without fault of his own to be cut off in the midst of his days. Personal bereavement is an ever present factor in human experience. On every side man's earthly lot is one of "much affliction, hazard, and difficulty," — a compound of highest hopes and bitter disappointments, of passing joys and long-drawn sorrows. Under pressure of these experiences so successful an author and statesman as Macaulay exclaims, "I have drawn a blank in life's lottery" ; and a still more successful man, the King of Israel, writes, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." But in this very consciousness of his limitations and wretchedness the nobility of man's nature is visible. "Man is the feeblest branch of nature ; but he is a branch that thinks. It needs not that the whole universe should rise in arms to crush him. A vapor, a drop of water, is enough to slay him. But though the universe should crush him, he would still be nobler than that which causes his death ; for he knows that he is dying ; and the universe knows nothing of its power over him." "What an enigma, then, is man ! What a strange, chaotic, and contradictory being ! Judge of all things — feeble earthworm ! depository of the truth — mass of uncertainty ! glory and butt of the universe !

If he boasts himself, I abase him ; if he humbles himself, I glory in him ; and I always contradict him, till he comprehends that he is an incomprehensible monster.”<sup>1</sup>

11. In this connection it is proper and important to notice how constant a factor in human existence is the hope of a future life. Even the superficial student of history cannot fail to be impressed with the general prevalence of a belief in immortality. For, notwithstanding the perpetual recurrence of death and the subsequent dissolution of the body, men of all degrees of culture have found it natural to believe that the essential qualities of the mind survive the shock of that universal, mysterious, and appalling catastrophe. The belief is found among races and individuals of all grades of intelligence and in all stages of civilization. In India and China, among the ancient Egyptians, and among the philosophers of Greece, incorporated into the religion of the barbarous tribes of aboriginal Europe, and into that of the savages of America, the belief in a future life has ever been one of the main-springs of human activity.

12. While the belief in immortality has everywhere existed among rude and ignorant people, it seems equally at home in a scientific age, since

<sup>1</sup> Pascal's *Thoughts*, chap. ii. Professor Bowen's translation, in *Modern Philosophy*."

nothing in the realm of physical science is capable of seriously disturbing the grounds upon which it reposes. For, as we have seen, it is manifestly impossible by the methods of physical science for the mind to get behind itself to obtain any more certain knowledge of its constitution than consciousness affords.

13. This tendency of the mind to disregard the obvious and appalling effects of death, and both to hope for and fear the continuance of conscious existence in another world, is one of the most significant facts in the whole range of human experience. The very power to form such an exalted conception is evidence of the native dignity of man's nature. However pitiable by comparison the earthly structure which even the wisest and best of men succeed in rearing, the foundation for hope laid in every human being is exceedingly broad. The incompleteness of the superstructure makes the magnificence of the foundation both more evident and more prophetic.

14. The strongest natural argument for human immortality is founded on this inherent contradiction between man's mental powers and his opportunities for development in such a world as this. Without the doctrine of immortality there is an apparent and striking incongruity between the endowments and the condition of man. The divine wisdom and veracity are peculiarly at stake in the



matter. When we squarely face the phenomena, it seems impossible that a wise Creator should have imprisoned such a spirit as man's in such a tabernacle of flesh, unless there were higher designs regarding him than are unfolded in this short life. In the hopes and fears and aspirations, as well as in the actual accomplishments of the human race, there are the promises of far greater things in the future. The curve on which the individual as well as the race is moving is a parabola — a line which never returns upon itself, but forever moves onward into space. There are "in man's nature evidences of a purpose stretching out into the limitless perspective of eternity."

15. But it is not within our province to detail in full the natural argument for human immortality. That is in place here only so far as this belief both supports and draws support from the Christian system. To our mind, however, the doctrine of immortality is properly derived from considerations respecting the capacities of man and his relations to God. It presupposes and rests upon theism. The doctrines of theism being conceded, the conscious immortality of the human soul may on natural grounds, be most reasonably inferred from the character and manifest capabilities of man and from the divine veracity, as involved in the completion of what is here begun. Then the conclusion (which may be more or less con-

vincingly inferred by the natural reason) is to us made doubly sure by the Christian revelation, which brings immortality fully to light; since, from whatever point of view we regard the gospel history, Christ intensifies beyond measure the antecedent argument for personal immortality.

If the Christ of the New Testament is divine, what an exalted creature must man be, to be worthy of such a visitation!

“My God! What is a heart,  
That thou shouldst it so eye and woo?  
Powering upon it all thy art,  
As if that thou hadst nothing else to do?”<sup>1</sup>

If, on the other hand, Christ be naught but human, what must humanity be, that it has given forth such a flower as a product! And what must the appropriate fruitage of that blossoming be? Or, if the character of Christ be a myth, how marvellous the mythical faculty which produced it! If a fabrication, how lofty the conceptions of the fabricator! On any theory regarding the history of Jesus, man is revealed as of such proportions that immortal life is the appropriate complement of this.

16. If, however, at this point it be objected that the natural argument on which we rely for the immortality of man may apply to animals, this only can be said: Let it apply, so far as it perti-

<sup>1</sup> George Herbert.

nently may. But note that it is applicable only to such animals (if any there be) as are conscious not only of existence, but of the insufficiency and incompleteness of the present life, and are capable of the conception of a futurity. To such it would apply ; but to those that fall short of this it has no application ; and the general analogies from the simpler faculties of the higher brute animals (which need not be depreciated), cannot be warrantably extended down the scale of being. The difficulty therefore (for such we allow it to be), does not extend very far.

But (as the friend who has furnished the substance of this paragraph puts it), the view which argues human immortality from the conceivable existence of an immortal principle in the lower and lowest forms of life, may be said to poise the pyramid on its apex, and the apex upon a logical fallacy. For the entire conception that brute animals may possibly be endowed with an immortal or immaterial principle, is wholly a reflection of our own conception of such a principle in ourselves ; and so the reasoning referred to is only one of the many ingenious ways of reasoning in a circle.

17. The point of the argument we are pursuing is, that a being such as man is, and so situated, may well enough be a disturbing force in the system of nature. In a reasonable system the wants

of such a creature should have adequate supply. If there be wisdom in the creation, man must have his appropriate place; and his presence in the universe as much implies a modification of the orbit in which all other created things move, as the existence of the planet Jupiter implies an adjustment of the course of the other planets to the force of its attraction. For, on the theistic hypothesis the behests of final causes are as imperative as the action of efficient causes is constant; and every object of creation is regarded by the author of nature according to its true relative value.

18. While the prospective pleasure of the worm must have had *some* force as an element of value determining to the creation as it is, and was a part of that "sufficient reason" moving the divine mind to creative activity in the modes which we witness, it is as evident that there are grades of happiness and hierarchies of created beings. The same impulse of designing mind which would lead to a provision for the sensational happiness of the oyster would also demand the subordination of oysters to a higher order of being.

"The sum is this: If man's convenience, health,  
Or safety interfere, his rights and claims  
Are paramount, and must extinguish theirs."<sup>1</sup>

The welfare of animals as well as of men was,

Cowper's Task, Book vi.

according to this view, an element in the final cause leading to the establishment of the present order of things. But for the sake of mollusks and insects, a designing mind would have made the course of nature *somewhat* different from that which exists. But for the sake of reptiles, birds, and the higher animals, he would have made it still more different. Had it not been that man was to be incorporated in the scheme, the plan would have been very different indeed ; for " How much then is a man better than a sheep ? " <sup>1</sup> " Ye are of more value than many sparrows. " <sup>2</sup>

19. A mastodon may feed on browse with pleasure, and can extract from it all the nutriment he requires. But man needs bread from bolted flour ; and his mind is adapted to a higher range of truth than is comprehended in the laws controlling the forces of physical causation. It may, indeed, be that the truth needed for the soul's inspiration and development is all in nature somewhere. But where is it ? And how can a finite being extract it ? Job's pathetic inquiry is still pertinent : " Where shall wisdom be found ? and where is the place of understanding ? The depth saith it is not in me, and the sea saith it is not with me. " <sup>3</sup>

Great as is the capacity of the human reason, it cannot digest all nature. It cannot exhaustively

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xii. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Luke xii. 7.

<sup>3</sup> Job xxviii. 12, 14.

interpret the marks of design in creation, nor forecast eternal conditions from natural data. The question before us is, Whether Christianity bears satisfactory marks of being a divine intervention to supply this higher circle of man's mental and spiritual wants? In discussing this subject, we come down to a definite question of evidence, involving also the general principles of theism heretofore enunciated. But while we should avoid presumption both in matters of physical science and in mental, we must in either realm keep clear of that false humility which disowns altogether the divine birthright of reason, through the exercise of which we may properly hope to penetrate somewhat into the realm both of final and of secondary causes, and to find practical, if only partial answer to the two inseparable questions, How does the Creator work? and What does he work for?

20. If the foregoing considerations do not conclusively show that a miraculous interposition in man's behalf is in conformity with the "law of parsimony," they do make it plain that it is difficult to prove any incongruity in the mere fact of a supernatural intervention.<sup>1</sup> Were any one to object to the Christian system that its provisions imply an exaggerated estimate of the value of human personality, he may be easily met with the question "how do you know that personality does

<sup>1</sup> Consult the Introduction to Paley's *Evidences of Christianity*.

not possess all the significance directly and indirectly assigned to it in the Christian system"? Even were we to leave out of view all the foregoing *prima facie* evidence of man's important position in creation, the argument from ignorance would still avail to break the force of many objections to Christianity. If it can be *demonstrated* that man is *not* immortal, and that the character formed in this life has no connection with the condition in a future life, this would indeed diminish our conception of man's worth, and diminish the antecedent probability of a miraculous interposition in his behalf. But immortality and the probationary character of this life are, at any rate, both allowable suppositions, the contrary of which cannot be demonstrated, and for the truth of which there are many cogent reasons independent of revelation.

21. Those who fail to discern the full "promise and potency" of man's personality, may be in much the condition related of certain unbelieving critics among the pearl oysters of the Indian Ocean. As oysters move and calculate distance it may well be believed that they call it many million miles from the shores of India to the wharves of London. — their miles being as much shorter than ours as our locomotion is faster than theirs. Now the rumor has reached us that among the historians of the pearl-oysters of the Eastern Ocean, much division of sentiment and irreconcilable party feeling exist



concerning a story which is firmly believed by many of the common individuals. The account is, that a long while ago, there appeared in the boundless expanse of waters above them what was called an English merchant ship, but which seemed to them well-nigh as large as the earth itself, for it filled nearly the whole horizon above them. Accompanying it were numerous strange beings, whose power was marvellous beyond anything that the denizens of the deep could comprehend, and whose means of knowledge exceeded anything they could estimate. According to the story, the shadow of this floating world for a long time overcast their sky, and its strange inhabitants descended, and ruthlessly removed various of the luckless tenants of the deep. The most of these were thrown back again; but a few sickly individuals, who for a long time had been only a burden to their friends, were carefully retained. These were, the story continues, carried to the marts of London, and put on exhibition for a period of time, where merchants from all parts of the world came to see them. At length there appeared among the visitors a merchant of great wealth who sold all that he had, and bought the largest of the pearls to grace the diadem of the king.

22. This account, it may well be supposed, passes among the sage historians of the shoals of Coromandel as a fairy tale, or as a legend of my-

thology. There is no apparent congruity between the means and the end. They can see no great worth in the pearls embosomed in their formless bodies. Indeed, the pearl is an incumbrance to the oyster, being the occasion of feebleness or the result of disease. But evidently oysters are not fit judges either of means or of ends. Utilitarianism among them is of a very low type. It is because of his superior knowledge that the merchant sees more worth in one translucent pearl than in a cubic mile of the coarser parts of their organization.

This may faintly illustrate how unsafe it is for us to form a negative conclusion regarding the dignity of conscience and the value of our rational powers—endowments which are so lightly esteemed by large numbers of the human race.

23. As related to the evidences of Christianity, the question of the dignity of human nature may be regarded in two aspects. It both supports those evidences and is supported by them. If man is indeed but “little lower than the angels,” and really “is crowned with glory and honor,”—and if nature alone is not sufficient fully to supply his wants, congruity demands that there be an interposition on the part of the Creator. And, on the other hand, if it is reasonably inferred that such an intervention has taken place, this inference adds immensely to our conception of man’s comparative worth.

## CHAPTER III.

### THE CHARACTER AND POWER OF CHRISTIANITY.

1. CHRISTIANITY should not be confounded with systems of mere casuistry and ethics. Its founders had a more difficult task than proving benevolence to be the sum of virtue. Moral philosophers are equal to that. Christianity, considered as a revelation, is a collection of miraculous facts, and supernatural doctrines designed to sustain the hope, elevate the aspirations, and promote the virtue of the human race. The founders of the Christian church proclaimed that in the person of Christ a supernatural being came to the earth and submitted himself to the common experiences of the race, and that through his name there is forgiveness of sin and the continuing presence in the world of a heavenly comforter. It should not seem strange that such supernatural doctrines required miraculous credentials. As the foundation of their belief in these doctrines, the apostles affirmed that Christ, who taught them, performed miracles, and himself arose from the dead, and subsequently appeared to them in bodily form.

Christianity professes to supplement nature in providing for man's wants, and purports to be a true and adequate revelation to man of God's designs regarding him, and to introduce into human history an operative power from above.

2. If Christianity is a system inaugurated and maintained by divine wisdom it is proper to expect from it an influence corresponding to its origin. And if it is true its beneficent influence ought to be manifest. If the Christian system be false, it is a stupendous falsehood; and if erroneous, it is surprisingly so. Unless such a system is true it could hardly avoid bearing the ordinary fruits of fraud and fanaticism. On the principle, then, that the tree is known by its fruits, we should now briefly consider what have been the direct and indirect results of the system, both in its effects upon individual and upon national life.

3. Looking first at the positive results of Christianity, we observe that notwithstanding the disabilities of his earthly condition, the Christian believer does learn to look upon the personal temptations, disappointments, infirmities, and sorrows of this life as blessings in disguise, and that to him death itself is robbed of its terrors. Through weary years of sickness the invalid is sustained by the Christian hope that all things work together for good to them that love God. In view of the fatherhood of God as revealed in the New

Testament the countenance of the mourner lights up with smiles, and he rejoices in saying "not my will, but thine be done." Through the promises of the gospel the poverty-stricken have hope of treasures which cannot be taken away; and those of a humble heart have faith that, though despised of men, nothing can separate them from the love of Christ. The widow and orphan are comforted in their sorrow. The lowly are set on high. Through the overmastering hope of a Christian faith, the death-bed of the believer becomes like the couch of a weary traveller. To the Christian hero it matters not where death may overtake him.

"Heaven is as near by water as by land."

It may come, as to Sir Humphrey Gilbert, with book in hand, calmly waiting for the waves and storm to do their utmost; or as to Sir John Franklin, amid the unknown snows of Arctic wastes; or as to Livingstone, amid the pestilential swamps of Africa; or as to Havelock, on the hard-won field of Lucknow. Our friends may die far from us, in the Everglades of Florida or on the plains of Mexico, or they may die at home; in any case death removes them from our sight, and remits their bodies to their original dust; but the hope of life and immortality brought clearly to light through the gospel of Christ equally remains to comfort in bereavement and to stimulate to patient continuance in well-doing.

4. Through the New Testament doctrine of divine forgiveness, and through the assistance to virtue furnished by the history of Christ, this hope of a life to come becomes a most powerful incentive to noble action among great multitudes of the human race. The whole present civilization of the world is permeated with these thoughts. They have stamped themselves on our art and literature, and on our laws and institutions. The ennobling influence of Christianity cannot well be disputed ; while its perversions find ready explanation in the prerogatives of human freedom, and really illustrate the inherent dignity of human nature ; for the follies of man are naturally proportionate both to the greatness of his nature and to the extent of his privileges. Under the influence of Christian ideas remarkable transformations of character are perpetually occurring. The frivolous become stable ; the despondent, hopeful ; the vicious, virtuous. That this influence is not only beneficent, but peculiar in its nature, is easily demonstrated to any one who will attempt by ordinary methods to induce in men that permanent change of character implied in the Christian doctrine of regeneration. It is no easy task to produce the fruits of Christian charity from the common stock of human nature.

5. But these peculiar effects have been abundantly produced in connection with the preaching

of the supernatural motives and hopes of Christianity. It may not be prudent, except in a general way, to refer to living witnesses of the transforming power of the gospel. It might be unsafe to laud the best of men highly while they are living, for we cannot tell what they may do before they die. We have, however, only to mention the names of a few well-known characters in history to reveal the striking unanimity with which those men and women whose lives are pre-eminent for their goodness refer to Christ as the main inspiration of their activity. It is sufficient to record the names of Augustine and Luther, of Pascal and Bishop Ken, of John Newton and Bunyan, of Howard and Wilberforce, of Wesley and Oberlin and Keble, of Channing and Finney and Carey and Judson, and the long list of contemporary missionaries whose self-devotion is the admiration of the world.

6. We have no room to speak of the Christian martyrs, nor to expatiate upon the peculiar virtues of such Christian women as Nonna, the mother of Gregory; of Arethusa, the mother of Chrysostom; of Monica, the mother of Augustine, and of Bertha wife of King Ethelbert. Space would fail us also to tell of those, both men and women, ‘‘ who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, . . . out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, . . . were tortured,



not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection.”

7. On looking, also, at society in its broader aspects, it is evident that modern civilization bears on its face the indelible and beneficent marks of Christianity. Architecture and painting and poetry and music, have all been inspired by it to their highest achievements. And, notwithstanding all that can justly be said of the opposition of misrepresenting bigots, *inductive science* has grown up in the soil prepared by the prevalence of Christian ideas, and has been sheltered under Christianity's fostering wing.

Wherever Christianity reigns the finer nature of woman is honored, and all those delicate sentiments preserved and nourished which render the Christian home the centre of the richest affections and the most ennobling influences in society. It is mainly through the prevalence of Christian ideas that means are now provided for the care and education of the poor, the insane, the diseased, the lame, the blind, and the dumb. Though it be true that much of the attention and labor bestowed upon these unfortunate members of society is misguided, nevertheless, the nobility of the aim in Christian philanthropy is unquestioned. Science needs to do more in guiding the benevolent impulses of Christian morality ; but hitherto the influence of Christian ideas has been

pre-eminent in creating the impulses worthy of guidance.

No well informed person fails to be impressed by the vast amount of desirable fruit revealing itself on the spreading branches of the common Christian faith. However much we may magnify the imperfections of Christian civilization, modern culture is unmistakably higher and nobler than that of ancient times. Western civilization possesses elements of hope not to be found in the East. The evil existing in Christian nations is largely incidental to progress, and often is a sign of self-recuperating power. The wars of Christendom are not so bad as the intellectual stagnation of a universal despotism, whether civil or ecclesiastical, would have been. America gives greater promise than Asia, and England than India; and all those competent to judge would echo the words of Tennyson :

“ Better fifty years of Europe than a cycle of Cathay.”

8. Now the inspiring faith of Christian civilization has always been thought to rest upon a miraculous and supernatural foundation. If we suppose the New Testament true, we have both an adequate and a reasonably congruous explanation of such a tide of beneficent influence as Christianity unquestionably originates; if we deny its truth, we are left to contemplate effects severed from every adequate cause. If we suppose the promise of the

Spirit's continued presence with the Church to have been fulfilled, there is a rational explanation of the remarkable rejuvenating power so often manifested in the history of the church, otherwise this rejuvenating power is without explanation.

9. It is profitable in this connection to observe how early the Christian apologists began to appeal to the superior character of the converts to Christianity as in a measure confirming the truth of the system.

Origen, writing in the early part of the third century, is full of such appeals. In rebutting the scoffs of the infidel Celsus, he challenges him to show among the Greek divinities "any one whose deeds have been marked by a utility and splendor extending to after generations, and which have been so great as to produce a belief in the fables which represented them as of divine descent." Whereas the name of Jesus could "produce a marvellous meekness of spirit and complete change of character, and a humanity and goodness and gentleness in those who do not feign themselves to be Christians, . . . but who have honestly accepted the doctrine concerning God and Christ, and the judgment to come."<sup>1</sup> He maintains that Christianity has no ordinary doc-

<sup>1</sup> See Origen, *Contra Celsum*, Lib. i. c. 68. The translation is by Rev. F. Crombie. Other illustrations may be found in Lib. ii. cc. 8, 48, 50, 51 and 52; Lib. iii. cc. 22, 28, 30, 33, 68, 81, *etc.*

trines to offer in justification of the remarkable events in the history of Jesus. But that God wished thereby to commend to mankind doctrines which were to save them, and which were to serve as a foundation for the rising edifice of a permanent form of religion. The miraculous history elevated into friendship with God those who believed it and practised the precepts of Jesus. This early Christian apologist repeatedly dwells upon the fact that the preaching of the gospel had power at once to "convert multitudes from a life of licentiousness to one of extreme regularity, and from a life of wickedness to a better, and from a state of cowardice or unmanliness to one of such high-toned courage as to lead men to despise even death through the piety which shows itself within them."<sup>1</sup>

10. On the contrary, it is impossible for us to realize how universally paganism has pandered to vice and strengthened itself by alliance with the immoral tendencies of human nature. The vices of heathen nations are not exaggerated in the first chapter of Romans. Heathen writers abound in disgusting details of the polluting practices to which the apostle briefly though faithfully alludes. Nor was it merely the crimes of individual license which the apostle rebuked. But, on the contrary, the lasciviousness of the ancient world was incor-

<sup>1</sup> Lib. iii. c. 67.

porated into the art and literature, and into every social, political, and religious institution of the age. Laborers were despised. Slavery in its most cruel form was everywhere practised, and there was no one to protest against its injustice to the slave, or to point out its danger to the master. The cruel games of the amphitheatre were the popular recreation. The monumental ruins of this depraved national taste are found not only in Rome, but in every province of the Roman Empire. In the amphitheatre delighted crowds beheld the deadly contests of gladiators, and the helpless struggle of unarmed prisoners with half-starved and ferocious beasts. The prevailing religion consisted in the worship of gods who were themselves the most heinous transgressors. However beautiful may seem many of the precepts of the prevalent stoical philosophy of the period, it was powerless to restrain the excesses of the people, or to ennoble the lives of any but the exceptional few among its votaries.<sup>1</sup>

11. The conversion of the world from such a moral condition as it was in at the time of Christ, and from such a state of public morals as exists

<sup>1</sup> See Tholuck on the "Nature and Moral Influence of Heathenism" in *Biblical Repository*, Vol. ii. (1832), pp. 80-124, 246-290, 441-499; also "The Gentile and the Jew," by Dr. Dollinger; and Dr. Uhlhorn's "Conflict of Christianity with Heathenism" (chap. ii.), now accessible to English readers in an excellent translation by Prof. E. C. Smyth and Rev. C. J. H. Ropes.

even now wherever heathenism prevails, is no holiday task. Yet it was the actual work of Christianity to soften the manners of that cruel age, to substitute for the iron rule of Roman law the reign of benevolence, to abolish slavery, to purify the public morals and give living power to a stricter code than that of the stoic, to eradicate the debasing yet seductive irreligious institutions of a vast empire (in Corinth, whose corruption was a proverb even in the heathen world, Christianity with the severe purity of its precepts, won some of its first and most remarkable triumphs); and to teach a nation of soldiers in which physical force was predominant, that "He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he who ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city."<sup>1</sup>

12. With similar confidence, and with corresponding success does the church of the nineteenth century send missionaries to heathen lands. No more than in the first century of our era, does Christianity show itself an effete system. At the same time one of the most remarkable phenomena in its history is its power to free itself from corruption, and, when evil principles have become incorporated into its life and practices, to work reform from within itself without destroying the fabric already reared. This results from the fact that it is not a mere mechanical contrivance, but

<sup>1</sup> Prov. xvi. 32.

a spiritual kingdom whose power is manifested in the hearts of men, raising their thoughts and affections, and fixing them upon the highest conceivable objects. To conceive of a kingdom of God based on the reconciliation of sinful man with his Creator, and to secure the prevalence of that kingdom to so great an extent, and amid such opposing forces, is, in itself, not far from the miraculous.

13. In recapitulating, it is sufficient to remark that, when we consider on the one hand the exalted aims of the Christian system, and on the other the great capacities of human nature, coupled with the disabilities of such a nature while wholly dependent for development on physical sequences of causation, a miraculous intervention for the establishment and maintenance of the system does not seem at all incongruous or unreasonable.

The anterior presumption so forcibly opposing scientific belief in miracles on ordinary occasions, disappears in such a crisis in human history as marked the introduction of Christianity. The end is so desirable that these means do not seem extravagant. Indeed, it is difficult to conceive how such a message, involving such profound changes in the aims of those who first accepted it, could have been accredited at first without miracles. It was as easy then as now to *say* to a palsied man "thy sins be forgiven thee;"<sup>1</sup> but it must have

<sup>1</sup> Matt. ix. 2.



been even more difficult to furnish evidence at that time on which one could properly believe it. The faith which can remove mountains requires a fulcrum. Hence the Saviour says, "that ye may know that I have power on earth to forgive sin, I say to thee arise, take up thy bed and go to thine house." The miracle accredited the message.

It was likewise easy for the Saviour to *say* the dead shall rise, but extremely difficult to give the doctrine of the resurrection that practical lodgment which it has among Christian believers. In fact, it is hard to conceive how, at the outset, this could have been accomplished except through such a miraculous verification of Christ's word as his own resurrection furnished.

On the other hand, the truth of the miraculous history and of the supernatural doctrines of Christianity being admitted, all the facts concerning its origin, its high purpose, its transmission, and its present power in the world find ready explanation. On the theistic hypothesis the marvel is, not that God has interfered *sometimes* with the course of nature, but that those manifestations are so limited.

14. Indeed, this old objection of Celsus,<sup>1</sup> arises for answer with every generation of unbelievers. Mr. Mill repeats it: "We see no reason in God's goodness why if he deviate once from the ordinary

<sup>1</sup> See Origen, *Contra Celsum*, Lib. ii. cap. 48; Lib. vi. cc. 78, 79.

system of his government in order to do good to man, he should not have done so on a hundred other occasions ; nor why, if the benefit arrived at by some given deviation, such as the revelation of Christianity, was transcendent and unique, that precious gift should only have been vouchsafed after the lapse of many ages, or why, when it was at last given, the evidence of it should have been left open to so much doubt and difficulty.”<sup>2</sup>

15. The comprehensive reply to this objection is, that the goodness and the *wisdom* of God must always be joined together. The goodness of God is not unconditioned in its manifestations. So far as we know these manifestations of goodness, they are conditioned by the actual creation and by the principles of wisdom incorporated into its correlated parts. We should recur in thought (though it is needless here to repeat it) to what was said earlier in this discussion about the relation to Omnipotence of the law of logical contradiction. The present objection to the supernatural element in Christianity overlooks the *power of the human reason to appropriate truth revealed through testimony and corroborated by circumstantial evidence*, and fails to admit the real authority of the evidence provided. It fails also to discern the difficulties into which we might fall through having too much of a good thing. It was Christ himself,

<sup>1</sup> *Essays on Religion* p. 235.

who said,<sup>1</sup> it was expedient for his disciples that he should go away, so that they should be left afterwards to depend largely upon the general influences inaugurated by him.

16. In reply to Celsus, Origen pointed out<sup>2</sup> that one of the strong *internal marks* of the honest purpose of the gospel narratives appears in the limits set by them to the actual use of the miraculous power ascribed to Christ.

“If it had been fiction,” says he, “*many* individuals would have been represented as having risen from the dead; and these, too, such as had been many years in their graves.” When the purpose of accrediting the divine message was accomplished, that was really enough. To have gone farther, as men under delusion would have been sure to do, would have conveyed a wrong impression as to what miracles were for, and would have called attention away from the great object for which a supernatural intervention exists, viz. that “the eyes of those who are blind in soul” are to be opened, and “the ears of those who were deaf to virtuous words” should “listen readily to the doctrine of God, and of the blessed life with him.”

17. Again, to the sneer of Celsus, that it was unlikely that the omnipresent God would confine his manifestation to one obscure corner of the

<sup>1</sup> See John xvi. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Lib. ii. cap. 48.

world, and to so uncultured a race as the Jews, the reply of Origen is as pertinent now as when he wrote it.<sup>1</sup> They were not in an obscure corner, but in as favorable a centre as can be imagined for the spread of the revelation at that time "when the word was about to be diffused from one corner over the whole world;" and the Jews were a people who had enjoyed a special degree of religious culture. "There is, therefore, nothing ridiculous in the Son of God having been sent to the Jews, amongst whom the prophets had appeared, in order that making a commencement among them in bodily shape, he might arise with might and power upon a world of souls which no longer desired to remain deserted by God."<sup>2</sup>

18. The difficulty now under consideration receives ample treatment at the hands of Bishop Butler.<sup>3</sup> In a chapter entitled "Of the want of Universality in Revelation, and of the supposed Deficiency in the Proof of it," he makes his appeal, like that of Origen, to the principle treated of in a former chapter of this work, viz. that in the nature of things, Creation is an act of self-limitation upon the part of the Creator, and that the wisdom of the conditions imposed upon the universe cannot fully appear except in view of the total object of creation. Dimness of light, in-

<sup>1</sup> Lib. vi. cap. 78.

<sup>2</sup> Lib. vi. cap. 79.

<sup>3</sup> Analogy, Part ii. chap. 6.

volves a trial of faith, and is one form of discipline, being in analogy with the other trials necessary to the existence of moral beings under the operation of general laws.

As the Bishop ably contends: "The evidence of religion not appearing obvious, may constitute one particular part of some men's trial in the religious sense, as it gives scope for a virtuous exercise or vicious neglect of their understanding in examining or not examining into that evidence. . . . The same character which, after a man is convinced of the truth of religion, renders him obedient to the precepts of it, would, were he not thus convinced set him about an examination of it upon its system and evidence being offered to his thoughts." After remarking further that want of all serious concern about a matter of such importance is as blameworthy as neglect of religious practice after conviction of the correctness of the precepts; he goes on to say that the fact "that religion is not intuitively true, but a matter of deduction and inference, . . . as much constitutes religious probation, as much affords sphere, scope, opportunity for right and wrong behaviour, as anything whatever does."

19. But we should not exaggerate the darkness in which the heathen world is left. According to the apostle, the heathen are without excuse. Their degradation is not altogether their misfortune; for

God "left not himself without witness in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness."<sup>1</sup> We must not make the mistake of supposing Christianity to be the sole manifestation of God. It is enough to maintain that it is the *most perfect* revelation of his will, and that it largely *increases* our knowledge of his purposes and of our duty. We can emphasize the advantage of this without disparaging those "uncovenanted mercies" of the Lord, which included within their influence Melchisedek and Job, and the wise men of the East who brought offerings to the babe of Bethlehem, and how many others we will not venture to say. Christianity is a supplementary revelation designed to give enlargement to moral forces already in some degree operative.

This is in analogy with the ordinary administration of the divine government, since nowhere is there a perfect equality in the distribution of blessings, and subjection of the individual to general laws necessarily involves the surrender of some advantages.<sup>2</sup> So long as God does no positive wrong to anybody, no one has occasion to murmur if a greater good is done to another. Better have one talent than none at all. If divine wis-

<sup>1</sup> Acts xiv. 17.

<sup>2</sup> See an Article by the Author, in *Bibliotheca Sacra*, for Jan. 1880, on Some Analogies between Calvinism and Darwinism.

dom directs to give ten to another, God has a right to do what he will with his own.

20. We may sum up the whole of the preceding argument in the compact phraseology of Paley.<sup>3</sup>

“Suppose the world we live in to have had a Creator; suppose . . . the Deity when he formed it consulted for the happiness of his sensitive creation, . . .; suppose a part of the creation to have received faculties from their Maker, by which they are capable of rendering a moral obedience to his will, and of voluntarily pursuing any end for which he has designed them; suppose the Creator to intend for these, his rational and accountable agents, a second state of existence in which their situation will be regulated by their behaviour in the first state, . . . Under these circumstances is it improbable that a revelation should be made? . . . Ought we not to expect that such a being, upon occasions of peculiar importance, may interrupt the order which he had appointed, yet, that such occasions should return seldom; that these interruptions consequently should be confined to the experience of a few; that the want of it, therefore, in many, should be matter neither of surprise nor objection?”

<sup>1</sup> Evidences of Christianity. Preparatory Considerations.



## CHAPTER IV.

### THE IMPERATIVE CHARACTER OF PROBABLE EVIDENCE UPON RELIGIOUS SUBJECTS.

1. As touching the extent to which, in matters regarding duty and future destiny, we are under obligation to accept Christianity as our guide, and are permitted to lean upon it for support, it is proper to remark upon the seriousness and urgency of the issues involved.

The doctrines of the Christian religion pertain to matters of the gravest practical importance. Christianity does not belong to the class of indifferent things. Death, judgment, and immortality are subjects which cannot be kept out of human thought; nor can theories regarding them be prevented from exerting a profound influence upon human conduct. The questions regarding them do not admit of postponement. The bare *possibility* of a future life to which this sustains the relation of a probationary period, peremptorily imposes the duty of being circumspect in our ways, cautious in our judgments, and diligent in our efforts to ascertain the truth. Certainly if Chris-

tianity is true, much depends upon accepting its truth and obeying its precepts. As man is situated, such hopes as the Christian religion arouses and stimulates in the hearts of the virtuous are not to be renounced on account of trivial objections ; nor can the fears engendered by it in the minds of the wicked be dismissed by showing some seeming deficiencies in its proof. The exigency of the case adds the weight of its imperative authority to whatever balance of probabilities belongs to the argument in favor of Christianity. The burden of proof rests very heavily upon those who *reject* the Christian system. At any rate, before one put out his hand to destroy so beneficent and fruitful a tree as Christianity has been, he should anxiously consider not only what he is destroying, but also what he is to substitute in its place.

2. As a recent writer has remarked.<sup>1</sup> “ It is indeed a grave thing for any thinking man, if over the whole moral world, a shadow has fallen which was not there before ; if in the firmament of heaven the sun has gone out forever without hope of return ; if it is to be agreed that for the facts of sin, of unhappiness, of pain, of death, there is no longer any remedy but what nature can give us ; if the Saviour of the world, the Redeemer of mankind has not appeared, if the Com-

<sup>1</sup> Dean Church, Sermons preached at Oxford. pp. 78-81. London. 1878.

forter has not come, if Christ has no church on earth. It is a thing to make us look aghast at conclusions, which, if true, are the most terrible announcement ever made to man, the ruin of all that millions have lived for, the most frightful proclamation of the victory for ages and ages, in the good, the wise, the pure, the suffering, of the most deadly and the most dreadful of cheats. . . . If we are to lose Him whom the world has hitherto looked to for its ideal and leaned on for its support, if the new world before us is to be one without the cross, or God, or immortality, let us know what we are about; let us have the seriousness which befits the surrender of such a hope, the seriousness with which a vanquished state surrenders territory or independence to the necessities of defeat, with which in the old strife of parties a beaten statesman surrendered his life and fate to the law."

3. Doubt is negative affirmation. The rejection of evidence is as really an exercise of faith as its acceptance. Credulity and incredulity are twin sisters. When evidence bearing upon a particular proposition is presented, the question arising is, Which attitude of mind is more reasonable, that of belief or that of unbelief? Credulity would accept, without proper questioning, all the evidence *for*; while incredulity would as summarily accept all the evidence *against*. The latter dogmatically

discredits all the arguments in favor. The former indiscriminately sets aside all the objections.

Unbelief is almost never a state of blank neutrality. It is as difficult to secure a perfect balance of evidence as to make an egg stand on end.

4. Christianity will rightfully retain its authoritative position so long as it is *better* supported by evidence than any rival system of belief touching the matters in question. Mere negative criticism can never dethrone it. Philosophical difficulties, common alike to every religious system and to every thoughtful view of the universe, cannot overthrow Christianity. To the sailor upon the ocean, called upon to abandon a vessel as unseaworthy, it would naturally occur to inquire what superior marks of soundness characterized the craft to which he is asked to transfer his hopes. The rival claimant must not only be *as good as*, but *better than* the one already in possession of confidence before confidence can be transferred. So also it will be soon enough to discard the New Testament when some utterances touching sin, forgiveness, and the future life *more* worthy of credence than those of its pages are produced. As we have before remarked, it cannot be urged to the special prejudice of Christianity that its evidence is not demonstrative, since it rests upon the same sort of a foundation with that of all the inductive sciences.

5. Granting his conclusions regarding the genuineness of the Gospels, the words of Professor J. H. Thayer,<sup>1</sup> upon this point (on summing up a critical argument for the historical character of the Gospels), are worthy of commendation. "If, after all the ingenuity hitherto expended on it, the question, 'How came the disciples to believe that Jesus rose from the dead on the third day'? still remains unanswered, it ought not to be regarded as censurable in us to think that the origin of the belief finds simple and satisfactory explanation in the fact. At any rate, all hypotheses thus far having been exploded, according to the judgment of the critics themselves, there should seem to be no other course left for plain people but to hold on a while longer to the opinion that the resurrection of Jesus was an actual occurrence. This opinion, to be sure, may possibly be erroneous; but it accounts for the origin and extension of the Christian faith as no other theory has accounted for them; it has witnessed the birth and death of every opposing opinion; it gives to the believer such light in darkness, such strength in weakness, such triumph in the hour of dissolution, that we may well adhere to it as a working hypothesis until the critics devise another which they agree among themselves in pronouncing to be more plausible."

<sup>1</sup> Boston Lectures for 1871, p. 373.

6. In regard to the conclusiveness and authority of probable evidence in such a case as we are considering, Bishop Butler, and in our own day Mr. Mansel and President McCosh, have forcibly expressed themselves in terms which, in this connection, we may well repeat.

Says the Dean:<sup>1</sup> one-half the objections to revealed religion "would fall to the ground if men would not commit the very irrational error of expecting clearer conceptions and more rigid demonstrations of the invisible things of God than those which they are content to accept and act upon in all the concerns of their earthly life."

Says the President:<sup>2</sup> "It is vain to expect demonstration in every line of inquiry. Demonstration is confined to a limited class of objects, and these characterized by their simple and abstract nature. In most of the sciences it is not available; it cannot be had in chemistry, in natural history, in psychology, in political economy. In the practical affairs of life no man looks for it." "Experiential evidence is often called moral,

<sup>1</sup> Limits of Religious Thought, Preface. Consult G. S. Faber's Essay on The Difficulties of Infidelity, sections ii., viii.; President Mark Hopkins's Evidences of Christianity, Lectures i., ii., and xii.; Sermons of President James Walker on Reason, Faith, and Duty. Nos. i. and xxii.; and especially Cardinal Newman's Essay in Aid of the Grammar of Assent, chaps. viii., ix. Also an Article in Contemporary Review for May 1879, by W. E. Gladstone.

<sup>2</sup> Laws of Discursive Thought, p. 160.

because it is possible for us either to attend to it or not to attend to it, and the act to be morally right or morally wrong." "The evidence adduced in behalf of the existence of God, of the immortality of the soul, of a day of judgment, and of the truth of the Christian religion, is all of this moral character. It is addressed to an understanding capable of weighing it, and a heart supposed to be ready to receive it. There may be excellence implied in the faith that receives it, and guilt involved in the perverseness which rejects it."

Says the Bishop: "In questions of difficulty, or such as are thought so, where more satisfactory evidence cannot be had, or is not seen, if the result of examination be that there appears upon the whole any, the lowest, presumption on one side, and none on the other, or a greater presumption on one side, though in the lowest degree greater, this determines the question, even in matters of speculation; and in matters of practice will lay us under an absolute and formal obligation, in point of prudence and of interest, to act upon that presumption or low probability, though it be so low as to leave the mind in a very great doubt which is the truth. . . . Nay, further, in questions of great consequence, a reasonable man will think it concerns him to remark lower probabilities and presumptions than these. . . . Numberless in-



stances might be mentioned respecting the common pursuits of life, where a man would be thought, in a literal sense, distracted who would not act, and with great application too, not only upon an even chance, but upon much less, and where the probability or chance was greatly against his succeeding.”<sup>1</sup> “To expect a distinct comprehensive view of the whole subject, clear of difficulties and objections, is to forget our nature and condition, neither of which admit of such knowledge with respect to any science whatever. And to inquire with this expectation is not to inquire as a man, but as one of another order of creatures. Due sense of the general ignorance of man would also beget in us a disposition to take up and rest satisfied with any evidence whatever which is real. . . . If a man were to walk by twilight, must he not follow his eyes as much as if it were broad day and clear sunshine? . . . How ridiculous would it be to reject with scorn and disdain the guidance and direction which that lesser light might afford him, because it was not the sun itself! . . . He may not make the dreadful experiment of leaving the course of life marked out for him by nature, whatever that nature be, and entering paths of his own, of which he can know neither the dangers nor the end. For, though no danger be seen, yet

<sup>1</sup> Analogy. Introduction.

darkness, ignorance, and blindness are no manner of security." <sup>1</sup>

7. The principle is worthy of frequent and emphatic repetition that, in all practical matters we are under obligation to use the best light we have, even though that should be dim and unsatisfactory in many respects. In every department of probable reasoning, we must accept the arguments having *most* weight. So long as the questions pertain to indifferent matters we may hold our judgment in abeyance. But as moral beings the necessity of choosing is continually laid upon us; and praiseworthy action may be said to consist in following the guidance of the highest probability while seeking the ends of virtuous choice. In all practical matters, both high and low, probability is our guide. "The farmer sows with the *probability* only that he will reap. The scholar toils with the probability, often a slender one, that his days will be prolonged and success crown his labors in subsequent life. The merchant commits his treasures to the ocean, and embarks all he has on the bosom of the deep under the probability that propitious gales will waft the riches of the Indies into port. Under like uncertainties the ambitious man seeks for honor, the votary of pleasure presses to the scene of dissipation; the youth, the man of middle life, and he of hoary

<sup>1</sup> Sermon "Upon the Ignorance of Man."

hairs alike crowd around the scenes of honor, of vanity, and of gain. Some of the noblest qualities of soul are brought forth only on the strength of probabilities that appear slight to less daring spirits.”<sup>1</sup> Illustrations of this latter principle appear in the history of nearly all the great inventors and discoverers and reformers, and patriotic defenders of liberty. In their sphere, and according to their measure, Galileo, Columbus, Luther, Washington, and the like, are the true children of Abraham, the father of the faithful. A common characteristic of them all is that their minds are open to the influences of some of the more recondite forms of moral or probable evidence. There can be no doubt that, in a large part of human affairs, readiness to believe upon the lower degrees of external evidence is the best index we have to the qualities both of the intellect and of the heart. “It is as real an imperfection in the moral character not to be influenced in practice by a lower degree of evidence when discerned, as it is in the understanding not to discern it.”<sup>2</sup> A little evidence on one side properly goes a great ways, where there is “no evidence to the contrary.”

8. The foregoing sections on the gravity of the interests staked upon the truth of Christianity have

<sup>1</sup> Slightly altered from Albert Barnes's *Introductory Essay to Butler's Analogy*, p. xxv.

<sup>2</sup> *Butler's Analogy*. Part ii. chap. 6.

not been introduced in this place in proof of the system, though they do have some bearing even in that direction ; for it is not credible that, in such weighty concerns, the Creator would allow so peculiar a deception to occur as Christianity is, if untrue. But certainly the practical importance of the system gives commanding authority to such balance of probability as may belong to the evidences considered in themselves. The imperative nature of the claims of such a system of religion does not arise solely from the *absolute* amount of knowledge it conveys about the subject to which it pertains, nor from the absolute amount of evidence supporting its behests ; but the imperative character of Christianity arises largely from its *relative* superiority in both these respects, and from the gravity of the interests involved. When at one time many turned back from following the Saviour, he asked his disciples if they, too, would desert him.<sup>1</sup> To which Peter made the significant reply, “ Lord, to whom shall we go ? ”

9. The starving lepers outside the walls of Samaria acted wisely when, on the bare *possibility* of saving their lives, they determined (in absence of other hope) to go into the camp of the besiegers. In such an emergency a slight balance of probability was as peremptory as a greater preponder-

<sup>1</sup> John vi. 67.

ance of evidence would have been in a less urgent situation. In some respects the emergency in which all religious action takes its rise is similar to this ; for what is human history, both public and private, but one long drawn crisis, full of tragic events actual in the past, and perpetually impending in the future ? For this emergency the Christian religion professes to provide. With what success it meets the demands, both of the intellect and of the heart, we have already partially indicated, and in the following chapters shall consider yet more fully.

10. The character and work of Christianity are so remarkable, that it is impossible for any one to ignore its evidences. The case is such that inaction regarding it becomes action of a very positive kind, and *unbelief* is *disbelief*. The Christian religion is not a novel experiment. Those who accept it are not like venturesome mariners who leave the solid land to embark upon an untried and suspected vessel ; for we are already upon the open sea, and the question is whether to abide in the ship about which we know so much that is favorable, or to abandon it for one of which we know scarcely anything. In such a situation conservatism is a virtue ; and, until the presentation of sufficient reasons for a change, the dictates of wisdom and prudence compel us to remain where we are, or at least to move with great caution, if

we move at all. Properly, then, we may pause at this stage of the argument and consider some of the difficulties involved in denying the supernatural origin of Christianity, and demand of those who reject the Christian religion their proof that it is not true.

Having (in the First Part) briefly considered the fundamental principles of Inductive Logic, and rapidly reviewed some of the processes of reasoning in various inductive sciences ; and having (in the Second Part) considered the evidences of the personality, power, wisdom, and benevolence of the Creator, and brought before our minds the contrast between man's native endowments and natural condition ; and having indicated in a general way the nobility of the aims of Christianity, and the greatness of its actual accomplishments, we are prepared now to consider the more specific evidences of Christianity ; and to acknowledge as of peremptory importance such conclusions as the nature of the subject will allow us to form.

PART III.  
THE SPECIFIC EVIDENCES,  
AND  
GENERAL SUMMARY.





## CHAPTER I.

### INTRODUCTORY.

1. THE history and work of Christianity challenge investigation, and ask to be accounted for. The phenomena are so remarkable that the explanation cannot avoid being also marvellous ; for if we represent Christianity as an outcome of nature, that does not eliminate the marvellous element, but only transfers it, and changes its name. It is imperative that we frame some positive hypothesis regarding that constitution of things in which a system of religion so remarkable in all respects as Christianity is, can originate and be perpetuated.

2. We are shut up to three methods of accounting for the origin of the system.

First, we may suppose that miracles were really performed, and that there was a supernatural revelation. If this theory be rejected, we are driven to a defence either of,

Second, a gigantic fraud ; or

Third, an immense delusion.

3. The hypothesis of *fraud* in the establishment

of Christianity is capable of division, according to the time in which the fraud is supposed to have been practised.

First, we might suppose the deceit to have been perpetrated by the founders of the system, upon the generation in which they lived. This asserts that Christ and the apostles were *imposters*.

Second, we might suppose the fraud to have been perpetrated at a later period, by those who wrote the purported history of the events. This would regard the documents as *forges*.

4. On the hypothesis of *delusion* likewise, we should have to suppose : Either,

First, that Christ and his apostles were themselves *deluded enthusiasts* who mistook their excited mental experiences for external realities. Or,

Second, that at a subsequent period the *whole church* were deluded, and mistook for real history embellished legends regarding Christ.

5. These hypotheses we will now consider, but in the inverse order as to time. We wish to place ourselves at the point where Christianity originated, that we may judge concerning its supernatural claims. We will, therefore, follow back the stream of time, and endeavor to eliminate from the problem such modifying causes as originated later than the apostolic age.

Our first inquiry pertains to the *genuineness of the documents* purporting to contain the records

of the origin of Christianity (or what is the same thing, the *apostolic* origin of the books of the New Testament) ; after which it will come in place to consider their authenticity.

6. The post-apostolic origin of the Christian records may be supposed either on a theory that they were pure forgeries, or that they had an unconscious growth, such as myths and legends are supposed to have. Or we may suppose them partly legendary and partly forged.

The hypothesis of *forged documents* needs no description ; it involves intentional falsification.

A *legend* is an unconscious embellishment or modification of " history with reference to conceptions of poetry, religion, or philosophy."

A *myth* proceeds from an *idea*, and unconsciously creates the story on which it seems to rest. Hence the myth is a transformation of poetical, religious, or philosophical ideas or tendencies, into the form of history.

In common language the boundary between the legend and the myth is not sharply defined. The fact from which a legend proceeds may be so insignificant that the embellishment is everything, and so it really becomes a myth. We may, therefore, in this discussion, use the words interchangeably without serious danger of misunderstanding.

7. In brief it may be said that, as applied to Christianity, the mythical hypothesis supposes

that some vague legends concerning an obscure, but remarkable Jew took (in the course of time, and as the result of various causes) the definite form and outline preserved in the gospel histories. According to this view the narrative, as we have it, was an unconscious accretion, in which the additions bear an inordinate proportion to the original nucleus. The causes supposed to have given character to the narrative are the human fancy and imagination, stimulated by the natural desires of religious people, and guided to some extent by the abundant occasions of theological controversy arising among the early leaders of the Christian church. Naturally enough the accretions are supposed to consist mainly of the miraculous accounts and the supernatural doctrines. These, however, form so large an element in the New Testament, that when they have been eliminated the remainder is more meager than those who make random assertions about the symmetry of the character of Jesus as a mere man can have imagined.

8. As it is impossible to present in full the considerations bearing upon the truth or falsity of the mythical hypotheses, without incorporating much which pertains to that of forged documents, we shall, to avoid repetition, present together the common body of facts by which all theories of a post-apostolic origin of the gospel records stand or fall.

In treating of the genuineness of the Gospels we shall group the facts about three propositions.

First, a collection of writings coinciding in the main with the New Testament as we now have it, was generally accepted as authentic before the close of the second century of our era. (Chap. ii.)

Second, the New Testament is of such a nature that its forgery would be exceedingly difficult, and its unconscious formation in the highest degree improbable. (Chap. iii.)

Third, the situation and character of the early church is a guarantee of the genuineness of their sacred records. (Chap. iv.)

In treating of the credibility of the miraculous accounts we shall consider,

First, the general sobriety of the narrative, when dealing with the most astonishing assertions. (Chap. v. 1-14.)

Second, the elevation and originality of the character of Jesus. (Chap. v. 15-35.)

## CHAPTER II.

### THE EARLY GENERAL ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

1. IN the limits of our inquiry we are not concerned with the comparatively unimportant questions touching the genuineness of isolated phrases of the New Testament. The variations in the manuscript copies of the New Testament, though numerous, are not serious, and do not affect the unity of the whole. In the main they are accidental, and correct one another; or, if intentional, the intention is transparent, and the error can readily be eliminated.

Nor need we pause here to settle disputes about the genuineness of a few longer passages, such as that concerning the descent of an angel into the pool of Siloam;<sup>1</sup> that of the woman taken in adultery;<sup>2</sup> the doxology to the Lord's Prayer;<sup>3</sup> the last twelve verses in Mark.<sup>4</sup> Our argument is even quite apart from the questions touching the genuineness of the Epistles of James, Jude, the

<sup>1</sup> John v. 4.

<sup>2</sup> John viii. 1-11.

<sup>3</sup> Matt. vi. 13 l.c.

<sup>4</sup> Mark xvi. 9-20.



second of Peter, and the second and third of John, and may keep aloof from the disputes concerning the Apocalypse and the Epistle to the Hebrews. The evidence of the genuineness of the Gospel of John, however, we shall here assume as on a par with that for the rest of the New Testament, — reserving some special remarks upon it to a later stage. The question now is not concerning some detached portions of the sacred records, but concerning the integrity and trustworthiness of the main account.

In proceeding, attention is first directed to the testimony, both direct and incidental, of the Christian apologists who wrote during the last half of the second and the first half of the third centuries of our era (A.D. 150–250). The plan of this discussion only allows us to mention the leading writers, and that with great brevity.

2. ORIGEN was born in Alexandria about A.D. 185, and died at Tyre A.D. 254. His writings are exceedingly voluminous; and, according to Tregelles,<sup>1</sup> “the *greater part* of the New Testament is actually quoted” in them. Toward the close of his life he wrote a long review of the arguments used by Celsus (of whom he speaks as long since dead), against Christianity.<sup>2</sup> Celsus’s book is not extant. But Origen entered so thoroughly into the work

<sup>1</sup> In Horne’s Introduction (1872), Vol. iv. p. 334.

<sup>2</sup> For further particulars see above, pp. 152 sq., 157–160.

of refuting it, that it seems to have been nearly all preserved in his extracts. In following the attack and the reply, the reader is taken over the whole range of metaphysical, scientific, and historical considerations within the grasp of the period. So exhaustive was the treatment, that unbelievers since have done little but rehabilitate the arguments of Celsus; and defenders of the faith can, in most cases, do little better than reiterate the answers of Origen. Celsus could not have been separated from the apostolic period by so long a lapse of time as separates us from the Declaration of Independence or the French Revolution. His attack abounded in sneers and ridicule; nevertheless, from its remains a tolerably full and correct abridgment of the history of Christ, and especially of his death and resurrection, could be compiled. It is evident that in the time of Celsus the genuineness of the Gospels was generally accepted, since even *his* presumption was not equal to the task of attempting to controvert their apostolic origin.

3. TERTULLIAN'S career falls somewhere between A.D. 160 and 240. He was born in Northern Africa, and resided at Carthage. In his philosophical tendencies he was a complete contrast to his contemporary, Origen. In his abundant writings, "there is not a chapter in the Gospels of Matthew, Luke, and John from which he does

not quote, and from most of them his quotations are numerous.”<sup>1</sup> The direct quotations of Tertullian from the canonical books of the New Testament, and the indirect allusions to them have been brought together by Rönisch,<sup>2</sup> and they fill a sizable volume of about five hundred pages. We may specially note, that in defending the Gospel of Luke against the mutilation of the heretic Marcion (who was a teacher in Rome as early as A.D. 140, and whose knowledge of Christ is undoubtedly derived from the same source with that of the third Gospel), Tertullian positively affirms that all the churches founded by the apostles, accepted not Marcion’s abridgment of Luke, but a well-known form which had been “*received from its first publication;*” and that the other Gospels had been received from the same authorities in authenticated copies.<sup>3</sup> Thus, at the close of the second century, he constantly appeals to the *public fame* of the present most important Christian records, and makes no use of any extra canonical Gospel.

4. CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA flourished between A.D. 165 and 220, and was for about ten years the principal master of the Christian school founded some time before in Alexandria. In his writings he displays the widest general knowledge of his

<sup>1</sup> Norton’s Genuineness of the Gospels, etc., Part ii. cap. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Das Neue Testament Tertullian’s, Von Hermann Rönisch. Leipzig. 1871.

<sup>3</sup> Adver. Marcion, lib. iv. § 5, and v. § 9.

age, as well as minute acquaintance with the original Christian documents. His abundant quotations are from almost every book of the New Testament, and he appeals to the "Four Gospels" as being the only authentic histories of Christ, and as having been "*handed down to us.*"<sup>1</sup> This confident appeal at that early period to the Gospels, as already established in the confidence of the churches is noteworthy. He also collected "divers accounts concerning the origin of the four Gospels, in order to prove that these alone should be acknowledged as authentic." "His very numerous quotations from the Gospels are also at the present day an important means of settling their true text."<sup>2</sup>

5. IRENAEUS was bishop of Lyons in Gaul (France), about A.D. 177, and died in the year A.D. 202. He was a disciple of Polycarp, and went out from Asia Minor as a missionary to Western Europe. Polycarp might well have remembered the apostle John whose convert he is reported to have been. In the treatise of Irenaeus "Against Heretics" (written as early as A.D. 180), he appeals to the four Gospels with as much confidence that they are all well-known and accepted by Christians as any one would do at the present

<sup>1</sup> Stromat, lib. iv. § 1.

<sup>2</sup> See Norton, Genuineness of the Gospels, Introductory chapter, also Part ii. cap. 1; also, "The Gospels in the Second Century," by W. Sanday.

day. Moreover, he endeavors to explain *why* there were four Gospels, and no more. As might be expected from the philosophical habits of that age, his main reason is fanciful enough. "As there are four regions of the world in which we live, and four cardinal winds, and the church is spread over all the earth, and the gospel is the pillar and support of the church, and the breath of life; in like manner is it fit that it should have four pillars, breathing on all sides incorruption, and refreshing mankind."<sup>1</sup> He mentions by name the supposed authors of the gospel history, and accurately characterizes the several books. His quotations from the Gospels are very numerous. A competent critic roughly estimates that Irenaeus quotes directly one hundred and ninety-three verses of Matthew's Gospel, and seventy-three of John's.<sup>2</sup>

We smile at the puerility of reasoning concerning the number of the Gospels. But the very element open to ridicule enhances the weight of his testimony to the important point, namely, that the Gospels were already firmly established in the confidence of the early church. The attempted explanation (though erroneous and even ridiculous), is the strongest evidence of this fact.

<sup>1</sup> *Contra Haeres. Lib. iii. c. 11, § 8.* Translation from Norton's *Genuineness of the Gospels.*

<sup>2</sup> Rev. W. Sanday.

6. JUSTIN MARTYR was of Greek descent. He was born in Palestine about A.D. 100, and suffered martyrdom not far from the middle of the second century, probably A.D. 165. The most important and best authenticated of his writings are the two "Apologies" (the first addressed to Antoninus Pius), and his "Dialogue with Tryphon." With scarce an exception, critics are agreed that these important documents were composed as early as A.D. 150. For his authority concerning the facts of Christ's life, he refers to the "Memoirs of the Apostles" (*τὰ ἀπομνημονεύματα τῶν ἀποστόλων*), and speaks of those who have written Memoirs of all things concerning our Saviour Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup>

Upon examination it is found that of the one hundred and twenty or more allusions which Justin makes to the Gospel history, nearly all coincide as to substance to the statements of either Matthew or Luke. Of the sixty or seventy apparently direct quotations, ten are exact, twenty-five are only slightly variant, while there are thirty-two in which the variation is considerable.<sup>2</sup> But in respect to variations from the original in quotation, it should be remembered that famili-

<sup>1</sup> See references in Westcott's Canon of the New Testament (4th ed.), p. 110.

<sup>2</sup> See discussion of the whole subject in Westcott's Canon, Norton's Genuineness, etc., and Sanday's Gospels in the Second Century, from which these facts are mainly taken.

arity often leads to carelessness with regard to minute points. Justin himself, out of one hundred and sixty-two quotations from the Old Testament, had only sixty-four exact, while forty-four were slightly variant, and fifty-four decidedly so. In some cases, however, Justin's quotations from the "Memoirs" incorporate so exactly the specific variations of Matthew and Luke from each other, that there can be no doubt that the text of those Gospels was before him. In general, it may be said with safety, that the Memoirs from which Justin quoted, differed less from the three first Gospels of our present Canon than they do from each other.<sup>1</sup> There are, it is true, a few items in Justin's references which are not found in our present Gospels; but these are remarkable for their fewness and unimportance. The surprising thing is, that in his time there were not more traditions current regarding Christ, not incorporated into the brief histories attributed by him to the apostles.

It should be noted that Justin expressly states that the "Memoirs" to which he refers, "were many and yet one; were called Gospels; contained a record of all things concerning Jesus Christ; were admitted by Christians generally; were read in the public services; were of apostolic authority, though not exclusively of apostolic authorship."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Sunday, as above, p. 99.

<sup>2</sup> Westcott, p. 115.



7. If any one is disposed to sneer at the apologetical literature written at the beginning of the third century, it is a tolerably sure sign that he has not read the writings in question, which, in the main are characterized by great ability, and by a remarkably exalted conception of the Christian system itself. The human infirmity displayed is incidental, and is in remarkable contrast to the sacred writings upon which they comment. In a more advanced age than our own, it will perhaps be difficult to peruse the writings of distinguished modern authors, either scientific or theological, if equally voluminous, without finding as many incidental crudities as appear in the works of the apostolic fathers. These general crudities prove the specific restraints under which they moved, just as the general fluidity of water proves the presence of some specific external force if a current moves in a definite direction. If Clement believed in the legend of the Phoenix, so did the accurate and sober-minded Tacitus. We can easily distinguish between the testimony of the historian to a fact, and his judgment as a philosopher.

8. In addition to this testimony, both direct and indirect, of Origen, Tertullian, Clement, Irenaeus, and Justin Martyr, that, in the last half of the second century the gospel history substantially as we now have it, was generally and almost exclu-

sively accredited in widely separated regions, we may note also the independent testimony of the early translators.

Edessa, still a flourishing city in the valley of the upper Euphrates, possessed an important Christian school during the latter part of the second century. From this period the Syriac versions (of which the Peshito is best known) of the New Testament undoubtedly date, and with the exceptions made at the beginning of this chapter, they comprised all the books now recognized as genuine.

If we turn our attention to Northern Africa, we find that "at the close of the second century Christians were found in every place and of every rank."<sup>1</sup> Throughout this region, Latin was the language of the common people; and here also, it is certain that during the last half of the second century a translation of some of the books of the New Testament into the common dialect was already current in Tertullian's time, and familiar to Irenaeus in Gaul. Its date cannot be placed later than about A.D. 170 or 180, and the probabilities are strong in favor of a still earlier existence.<sup>2</sup> The so-called Vulgate of our time was a revision by Jerome, in the fourth century, of earlier Latin translations.

<sup>1</sup> Westcott, *On the Canon* (4th ed.), p. 246.

<sup>2</sup> See Westcott, as above, p. 254.

From another independent source we have in the "Muratorian Canon,"<sup>1</sup> satisfactory evidence of the existence in collected form in Italy, of all the more important books of the New Testament before the close of the second century. Without much doubt the above-named fragment was written as early as that date, and it gives a list of the books in the order in which they now stand (excepting some of those excluded from our present consideration), and speaks of them throughout as generally received.<sup>2</sup>

9. There can be no question, then, that the Christian apologists at the close of the second century and the beginning of the third, were *commentators*; not forming a system, but shaping one which had grown out of a history recorded in documents not then in dispute. They had the New Testament substantially as it now exists; they found it already collected, translated, and

<sup>1</sup> See Westcott and Sanday, as above.

<sup>2</sup> It will be perceived by those who have read the recent anonymous book, entitled "Supernatural Religion," that however much weight may justly be given to the author's minute criticism, so far we scarcely touch the ground he has occupied,—and we do that, only in some of our statements respecting Justin Martyr, and the heretics Marcion and Celsus, and the Muratorian Canon. But, while believing our own statements to be correct, we might without serious prejudice to our argument leave out these controverted points. Only the danger of raising too many unimportant side issues has restrained us from referring to the confirmatory evidence from the testimony of earlier writers.

believed in as authentic. They thought they knew the difference between the genuine records and the spurious. The Eastern churches accepted the same four Gospels with the Western. The Acts and the Epistles of Paul were current wherever Christianity had a foothold. The translations made in the valley of the Euphrates agreed in substance with the versions made into the vernacular of Northern Africa and Italy. It will be in place to consider the significance of these facts, when we have briefly collated what is known from external testimony concerning the churches and their teachers during the early part of the second century.<sup>1</sup>

In estimating the probability that the sacred records of the church originated in the second century through either fraud or delusion, we must **in** the next place examine the records themselves.

<sup>1</sup> See below, chap. iv.

## CHAPTER III.

### CHARACTER OF THE HISTORICAL DOCUMENTS IN QUESTION.

#### I. Artlessness of the New Testament.

1. THE variety of incident and style in the New Testament is extreme. In geologic phrase, that remarkable book is a conglomerate of the most diverse pebbles, the elements of which are already, at the period mentioned (A.D. 170 or 180), firmly cemented together. There are in the collection four biographies of Jesus, succeeded, first, by a book purporting to contain an account of the effects in different places of proclaiming the facts recorded in the Gospels and the inferences naturally flowing from them. The Book of Acts is of itself a phenomenon. The prominent characters in it are Peter and Paul — men who differed from each other in almost all natural as well as acquired characteristics; and who repeatedly proclaimed the fundamental facts of the Gospels, each in his own way and according to the requirements of the various audiences addressed. Such repetitions, by such persons, amid such variety of

circumstances as accompanied their ministry, have the same value in historical evidence with the privilege of rigid cross-examination furnished by the courts in legal trials.

For many reasons, also, Paul was an unlikely personage to be arbitrarily introduced into the number of the apostles. The apostles had promptly chosen a successor to fill the vacancy caused by the defection and suicide of Judas. But of this person we hear no more; while Paul, a seeming intruder, eventually becomes the foremost of the whole company. Of the Epistles thirteen were certainly written by him. In these Epistles the opportunity to cross-question the gospel witnesses is still farther extended.

2. Altogether the documents in question pertain to a period of about sixty years. Not only does truth require these documents to agree among themselves; but, incidentally, innumerable references are made to the geography of the whole Roman Empire, and to the political, social, and ecclesiastical affairs of the entire period covered by them. The facilities for cross-examination afforded by this composite character of the New Testament are not appreciated by the careless reader. There is throughout the whole book an unconstrained and unreserved reference to all kinds of incidental matters. It is this which constitutes the most important element in that artlessness so fre-

quently and justly ascribed to the sacred records. A conscious design to deceive is a constraining power, ordinarily and naturally producing a symmetry which is apparent, rather than real. Works of nature are contrasted with works of art in the success with which they endure close examination. In ordinary matters the microscope discloses the imperfection of human tools and human workmanship. On carefully comparing fiction with actual history (supposing the range of events to be considerable) the indications of art are not less evident than in attempts to counterfeit objects in the material creation. Fully to perceive the value of this mode of criticism, it is needful to descend into particulars.

## II. Incidental allusions to affairs in Judea.

3. In extending the examination we encounter, throughout the New Testament, *numberless incidental allusions to external matters*. The bearing of this fact is so important that it deserves a passing illustration.

In the process of finishing cloth it is stretched upon a *tenter*. It was once in dispute whether an invoice of cloth was really the product of a given manufacturer. The roll was taken to his *tenter*, and the question was put beyond dispute by finding that the marks of the *tenter-hooks* corresponded exactly to those which would be made



upon his frames. What the *tenter-hooks* are to the piece of cloth, the connecting incidents of general history are to a particular story. The records of Christianity are stretched upon a framework of outside historical events. These records do not, indeed, contain a professed history of the world during the period when the events occurred; but relate strictly to facts touching the origin of Christianity, with only such incidental allusions to other transpiring events as are either necessary or natural.

4. The general history of the age and country in which the Christian documents originated is very fully preserved. Within the century following the death of Christ were composed the writings of Josephus, Plutarch, Tacitus, Suetonius, Juvenal, and Pliny; while the literary emperors, Trajan and Adrian, made the promotion of culture a chief object of their respective reigns.<sup>1</sup> The political condition of Palestine at this time was curiously "complicated and anomalous; it underwent frequent changes, but retained through all of them certain peculiarities which made the position of the country unique among the dependencies of Rome." There was such a mixture and alternation of Roman and native rulers and

<sup>1</sup> See for fuller particulars the Seventh of Professor George Rawlinson's Bampton Lectures for 1859, from which we freely quote.

authority that it must have been very difficult for any but a native and contemporary to have thoroughly understood it. "A double system of taxation, a double administration of justice, and even, in some instances, a double military command, were the natural consequence; while Jewish and Roman customs, Jewish and Roman words, were simultaneously in use; and a condition of things existed full of harsh contrasts, strange mixtures, and abrupt transitions. Within the space of fifty years Palestine was a single, united kingdom under a native ruler; a set of principalities under native ethnarchs and tetrarchs; a country in part containing such principalities, in part reduced to the condition of a Roman province; a kingdom reunited once more under a native sovereign; and a country reduced wholly under Rome, and governed by procurators dependent on the president of Syria, but still subject in certain respects to the Jewish monarch of a neighboring territory." Even Tacitus and Dio Cassius were bewildered by these frequent changes in the civil history of Judea.

"The New Testament narrative, however, falls into no error in treating of the period; it marks incidentally, and without effort or pretension, the various changes in the civil government, the sole kingdom of Herod the Great,<sup>1</sup> the partition of his

<sup>1</sup> Matt. ii. 1; Luke i. 5.

dominions among his sons,<sup>1</sup> the reduction of Judea to the condition of a Roman province, while Galilee, Iturea, and Trachonitis continued under native princes,<sup>2</sup> the restoration of the old kingdom of Palestine in the person of Agrippa the First,<sup>3</sup> and the final reduction of the whole under Roman rule, and re-establishment of procurators as the civil heads,<sup>4</sup> while a species of ecclesiastical superintendence was exercised by Agrippa the Second.<sup>5</sup> Again, the New Testament narrative exhibits, in the most remarkable way, the mixture in the government — the occasional power of the president of Syria, as shown in Cyrenius's 'taxing';<sup>6</sup> the ordinary division of authority between the high-priest and the procurator;<sup>7</sup> the existence of two separate taxations — the civil and the ecclesiastical, the 'census'<sup>8</sup> and the 'didrachm';<sup>9</sup> of the two tribunals,<sup>10</sup> two modes of capital punishment, two military forces,<sup>11</sup> two methods of marking time.<sup>12</sup> At every turn it shows, even in such little matters as verbal expressions, the co-existence of Jewish with Roman ideas and practices in the country — a co-existence which (it must be remembered) came to an end within forty years of our Lord's crucifixion."

<sup>1</sup> Matt. ii. 22; xiv. 1; Luke iii. 1.   <sup>2</sup> Luke iii. 1 sq.

<sup>3</sup> Acts xii. 1 sq.

<sup>4</sup> Acts xxiii. 24; xxiv. 27 sq.

<sup>6</sup> Acts xxv. 14 sq.

<sup>6</sup> Luke ii. 2; Acts v. 37.

<sup>7</sup> Matt. xxvii. 2; Acts xxii. 30; xxiii. 1-10.

<sup>8</sup> Matt. xxii. 17.

<sup>9</sup> Matt xvii. 24.

<sup>10</sup> John xviii. 28, 32 sq.   <sup>11</sup> Matt. xxvii. 64, 65.   <sup>12</sup> Luke iii. 1

### III. Incidental allusions to the Greek and Roman World.

5. The correctness of their allusions to the Roman Empire is equally significant. The Acts and the Epistles abound in references to the affairs of Syria, Asia Minor, Greece, and Italy, — an expanse of territory more than one thousand miles in length, and scarcely less in breadth, and including the greatest variety of political arrangements and of national, social, and religious conditions. Yet in all this freedom of incidental allusion there are now but two or three difficulties awaiting a satisfactory explanation. Many difficulties formerly existing have been solved by recent discoveries. The tendency of critical investigation has been not to multiply inconsistencies, but to dispel them. One or two instances in illustration of this tendency must suffice.

Under the reign of Augustus Caesar the provinces of the Roman Empire were divided up between the senate and the emperor. But there were frequent transfers from one authority to the other. The governors appointed by the senate were styled proconsuls; those reporting to Caesar were designated by the military title, propractor. A writer treating of that period, and using those definite appellations, rather than more general terms, would be in great danger of exposing his lack of minute information. A foreigner of

the twentieth century making wide-spread and various references to political affairs in the United States during the nineteenth century (when he must distinguish between the jurisdiction of the supreme court and circuit court of the National Government, and that of the courts of the states and territories, and reconstructed states partially under military rule; and must understand the distinctions between the regular army and the volunteer army and the state militia, etc.), would be in about the position of the writers of the New Testament, if these writings (involving as they do, accurate knowledge of the boundaries of the consular and praetorian powers in the time of Augustus), had been the work of the second century of our era.

6. Sergius Paulus is called by the writer of Acts proconsul (*ἀνθυπάτωρ*) in Cyprus.<sup>1</sup> But Strabo expressly said that Cyprus was retained by the emperor for himself, in which case the governor would properly be styled *propraetor*.<sup>2</sup> Hence the older commentators (Grotius among them) were compelled to explain, in this case, a seeming inaccuracy on the part of Luke. Later researches have, however, established the exactness of Luke's use of official appellations. Dio Cassius,<sup>3</sup> who also

<sup>1</sup> Acts xiii. 7, where the word is translated deputy in the authorized version.

<sup>2</sup> Strabo, xvii. 3.

<sup>3</sup> liii. 12, 14; liv. 4.

mentions the fact that Cyprus was retained at first as a praetorian province, adds that Augustus afterwards exchanged it with the senate for another province. Recently, also, a coin has been discovered, struck during the reign of Claudius, and stamped with the name and authority of the *proconsul* of Cyprus, and Claudius was emperor when Paul revisited the island.<sup>1</sup>

Another similar instance appears in Acts xviii. 12. Gallio, it is said, was governing as proconsul in Achaia (*ἀνθυπατεύοντος τῆς Ἀχαιῆας*) when Paul was in Corinth. This, also, was during the reign of Claudius. But under the two preceding emperors, Tiberius and Caligula,<sup>2</sup> Achaia was governed by propraetors. The change, as we now know, was made by Claudius.

These are only two examples of the numerous minute coincidences between the incidental references of the New Testament writers, and modern or critical discoveries concerning the alleged period of their writing. The subject is well nigh exhaustless. Real difficulty in the way of harmonizing the accounts exists, at the present time, only in a few cases, and those instances are not such as absolutely to forbid explanation.

Facts like these make it "evident that the entire

<sup>1</sup> See "Life and Epistles of St. Paul," by Conybeare and Howson, Vol. i. p. 141 sq.; also Hackett on Acts xiii. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Tacitus Ann., i. 76; Hackett on Acts xviii. 12.

historical framework in which the gospel picture is set, is real"; and that the reported incidents of the civil history, "small and great, are true." Comparison also shows that in all important particulars, and so far as known, the historical personages characterized in the New Testament are "correctly depicted."<sup>1</sup>

7. We shall have occasion, at a later stage in this discussion, to point out that the accurate adjustment of the New Testament histories to the complicated frame-work of contemporary events bears with great weight against what is called the mythical origin of the New Testament books. It also goes far to exclude the theory of conscious fraud on the part of the writers. Since if these books are forgeries they must have been the work of men of vast learning and most extensive experience, and must have been written under the constraint of a most powerful artistic impulse. A forgery is an attempt to deceive by imitation, and implies a conscious effort on the part of the author of it. As a forgery, the New Testament is too extensive and complicated to allow of success. A *conscious* attempt to adjust the story to the external setting of facts would have betrayed itself in numerous well-known ways; while the unconscious and later action of the mythical faculty would have omitted these numerous inci-

<sup>1</sup> G. W. Rawlinson, Bampton Lectures, No. vii.



dental allusions to the history of a preceding century.

Passing now from the harmony between the gospel records and external history, we proceed to compare the documents among themselves.

#### IV. The Internal and undesigned Harmony of the Gospels.

8. THE harmony existing in the New Testament is not sufficiently manifest on the surface to have been the product of designing men. The coincidences between the four Evangelists are many of them extremely obscure. The Gospels can be harmonized, but not without severe study and continuous appeal to our ignorance of connecting circumstances. The evidently undesigned coincidences between the Acts and the Epistles of Paul have been so fully treated by Paley in his *Horae Paulinae*, that reference to that celebrated book is sufficient for our present purpose as respects that portion of the New Testament. But the force of Paley's method of reasoning may profitably be illustrated by a few instances of its application to the four Gospels.

9. That the agreement of the records within themselves is *undesigned*, is apparent from their form and structure. As we have said, the New Testament is what geologists would call a conglomerate. There are first, four avowedly distinct

histories of Jesus ; a close examination of which shows clearly enough that they are not copies one from another, nor yet from any other extant *written* document. The harmony pervading these separate accounts is manifestly not the result of artifice, since it is far more profound than the inelastic verbal agreement of mere copyists. It has often been observed that while the portraitures of Jesus by the New Testament writers agree in essentials they differ remarkably in details. In this respect the Gospels may be compared to separate pictures of the same landscape, drawn by different artists from different points of view. Each of the four Gospels presents a clearly marked individuality of style, and the general grouping of the facts is also in each case peculiar.

On going through the first three Gospels, a remarkable coupling of concordances with incidental peculiarities is found to pervade almost the whole. In those portions professing to recite the conversations of Jesus the coincidences both verbal and incidental are striking ; while in those sections which narrate the actions of Christ and his associates diversity of expression is the rule.

10. To illustrate this we will examine one instance, taken at random, and because it is short. It is the account of the healing of a leper, given by each of the first three Evangelists. We give a literal translation (slightly altered from the version of Professor Noyes) in parallel columns.

MATT. VIII. 2-4.

And behold, there came a leper and bowed down [*προσεκύνη*] before him, saying,

"Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst cleanse me."

And he [Jesus] stretched forth his hand, and touched him, saying, "I will; be thou cleansed."

And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.

And Jesus saith to him, "See thou tell no one; but go show thyself to the priest and offer the gift which Moses enjoined for a testimony to them."

MARK I. 40-45.

And there cometh to him a leper beseeching him, and kneeling down [*γυνυπέτω*] to him, and

saying to him, if thou wilt thou canst cleanse me."

Then Jesus, moved with compassion, stretched forth his hand and touched him, and saith unto him, "I will; be thou cleansed." And as soon as he had spoken, immediately, the leprosy left him, and he was cleansed.

And strictly charging him he immediately sent him away, saying to him, "See thou say nothing to any one; but go, show thyself to the priest and offer for thy cleansing what Moses enjoined, for a testimony to them."

But he went out and began to proclaim it much, and to spread the rumor abroad, so that he [Jesus] could no longer openly enter into a city, but was without in desert places; and they came to him from every quarter.

LUKE V. 12-16.

And it came to pass, when he was in one of the cities, behold a man full of leprosy; and seeing Jesus, he fell on his face [*πεσὼν ἐπὶ πρόσωπον*] and besought him, saying, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst cleanse me." And he stretched forth his hand and touched him, saying, "I will; be thou cleansed," and immediately the leprosy left him.

And he charged him

to tell no one, but "go, show thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing as Moses enjoined, for a testimony to them."

But so much the more went abroad the rumor concerning him, and great multitudes came together to hear and to be healed by him of their infirmities. But he was wont silently to withdraw himself [*ὑποχωρῶν*] in the deserts and pray.

11. It is evident from an examination of these parallel passages that the set phrases common to them all are short, and a striking proportion of them are put into the mouth, either of Jesus or the leper; but even in the last quotation there is not exact verbal coincidence. Matthew speaks of "the gift," and leaves the purpose to be supplied by the reader. Mark and Luke both speak of the ceremonial cleansing, but refer to the gift in a more general way. Still, it is manifest that these so-called "recitative" portions are from the same quarry.

But the larger part of these extracts narrate the accompanying incidents of the transaction. A comparison of the "narrative" portions shows that they are complementary to each other, just as independent accounts by different witnesses of the same scene would naturally be. The attitude of the suppliant before Jesus is differently represented by each narrator. The leper "bowed down," says Matthew; "kneeled down," says Mark; "fell on his face," says Luke. Luke also mentions that the man was "full of leprosy." Mark alone distinctly mentions the "compassion" which "moved" Jesus; and qualifies the "immediately" with the phrase "as soon as he had spoken." The cleansing is likewise described in a threefold manner. Mark alone speaks of Jesus' *sending* the leper away, and of his strictly or

*severely* charging him. Matthew omits the concluding incidents mentioned by the other two. Luke alone mentions that the multitudes thronged Jesus, "to hear and to be healed by him." There is also a verbal variation in the account of the spreading of the rumor of the miracle. Luke only in this connection mentions prayer as an object of withdrawing to desert places. It would be impossible to give any motive for these variations in a forgery; and the variations are too many and too incidental to have grown out of individual treatment of a common earlier written document. The parallel accounts bear every internal mark of being independent versions by persons who heard and saw what they related.

12. The relation of these concordances and diversities is capable of expression in tabular form.<sup>1</sup> Narration of facts compose one quarter of Matthew, one third of Luke, and one half of Mark. The other portions are simply reproductions of the substance of Christ's sermons and colloquies. Nine tenths of the incidents related in Mark are also recorded in the other Gospels, while in Matthew the proportion is three fifths, and in Luke two fifths. Now the *verbal* coincidences between Matthew and the other Gospels constitute less

<sup>1</sup> See Norton's *Genuineness, etc.*, Vol. i. p. 188 sq.; also Westcott's *Introduction to the Study of the Gospels* (Am. ed., 1872), chaps. iii. and iv.

than one sixth of the matter common to all; while the proportion of verbal coincidences to concordance in matter between Luke and the others is about one tenth, and of Mark about one sixth.<sup>1</sup> Thus the approximate relation between the general and verbal coincidences of the Gospels may be represented tabularly :

MATTHEW.	LUKE.	MARK.
24 : 7.	9 : 1.	39 : 7."

But the "verbal coincidences are more frequent in the recitative than in the narrative portions" in the following ratios, nearly :

MATTHEW.	LUKE.	MARK.
12 : 5.	9 : 1.	4 : 1.

13. In the words of Mr. Westcott:<sup>2</sup> "There is a marked difference between the composition of the recitative and the narrative parts of the Gospels. In the former there is a prevailing unity, in the latter an individual style. The transition from the one to the other is often clear and decided; and the most remarkable coincidences are, in several instances, prefaced by the most characteristic differences. It is evident, then, that the problem involves two distinct conditions, and a satisfactory solution must account not only for the general similarity which the Gospels exhibit in their construction and contents, but also for the peculiar distribution of their verbal coincidences. Any theory which leaves

<sup>1</sup> See Westcott, as above, p. 203.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 205.

one or other of these points unexplained must be considered inadequate and untrue."

14. Furthermore, as the same writer continues, "The three records [the first three Gospels] are distinct, as well as similar, in plan and incident and style. Each presents the form of a complete whole, whose several parts are subordinated to the production of one great effect. Each contains additions to the common matter, which are not distinguishable externally from the other parts; and the Gospel of St. Mark, which contains the fewest substantive additions, presents the greatest number of fresh details in the account of common incidents. Each is marked by peculiarities of language, which, notwithstanding the limits within which they are confined, penetrate throughout its contents. In many cases, as in the genealogies, and in the narratives of the Passion and the Resurrection, these differences amount to serious difficulties, from our ignorance of [some of] the circumstances on which the accounts depend; and even where it is not so they are distinct and numerous, and offer as clear a proof of the actual independence of the Gospels as the concordances offer of their original connection."

15. By the familiar methods of inductive logic it is easy, with these facts in hand, to exclude from our theories of the origin of the Gospels the supposition of any serious modifying action upon



them of the mythical tendency in human nature and that of several other hypothetical influences. (a) The supposition that two of the Evangelists copied from the other is negatived by the peculiarities belonging to each. (b) The supposition of a common *written* original to which all three were indebted for their material fails to account for, "the changing limits of coincidence and variation, together with general identity of plan," as well as for the loss of all tradition concerning the supposed original. (c) Nor can the Gospels, with any consistency, be conceived of as mere mosaics resulting from the combination of fragmentary documents, each of which was a jewel in itself. In this case the beauties of the separate portions would have to be accounted for singly, as well as the superior beauty of the organic whole, which is too perfect to be the work of such art. (d) The hypothesis of an oral tradition, from which, as from a quarry, the written gospels were derived fails us, on account of the substantial unity of plan and incident, and by reason of the verbal coincidence in the colloquial portions, *unless we assign the date of the writing to the period when the personal companions and adherents of Christ were still living*, in which case it becomes a most trustworthy species of historical evidence. There are not those accretions and additions and irreconcilable divergences which

would arise if the transmission of the facts had been *long* dependent upon unwritten history. The curves of the orbits in which the Gospels move show that the writers are not far from the central luminary of the system.

16. As a single further illustration of the profound and subtle character of the harmony pervading the Gospels, we present the remarkable manner in which the phrase Son of Man is employed in the New Testament.<sup>1</sup> The leading peculiarities in the use of this appellation in the Christian records are these.

(a) First, it is only put into the mouth of Jesus when speaking of himself. In Matthew he is made to style himself Son of Man thirty-two times; in Mark (xiii. 34 not counted), fourteen times; in Luke twenty-six times, and in John (xii. 34, twice by the people in quotation not counted), ten times; making in all eighty-two times. Indeed, he scarcely ever is made to apply any other appellation to himself. In John there are three or four instances of his styling himself "Son of God." There are also in the fourth Gospel many instances in which he speaks of himself simply as the "Son" leaving the adjunct to be supplied by the nature of the case. But,

<sup>1</sup> For this and the two succeeding paragraphs, credit should largely be given to the oral instruction of Professor John Morgan, D.D., of Oberlin, Ohio.

(*b*) In the conversations and writings of the apostles, the phrase never occurs except in three instances,<sup>1</sup> and in quotation; and those exceptions prove the rule, for in the case both of Stephen (in Acts), and of the writer of the Apocalypse, a heavenly vision is supposed.

(*c*) Still another peculiarity is that the definite article is in almost every instance associated with the appellation as applied to himself by Jesus.

(*d*) The phrase is connected with the most startling exercise and assumption of power on the part of Christ. As "the Son of Man" he heals the sick and forgives sin;<sup>2</sup> and is to come in the glory of his Father;<sup>3</sup> is Lord of the Sabbath;<sup>4</sup> is to judge the world;<sup>5</sup> to rise from the dead;<sup>6</sup> to give his life a ransom for many;<sup>7</sup> to ascend to heaven, and to bestow everlasting life upon those who believe in him.<sup>8</sup>

17. On what theory is it possible to account for the double-faced fact that Jesus applied the appellation so constantly to himself, while the adoring disciples so carefully avoided its use? If it was to them (as devout Jews) pregnant with the exalted Messianic hopes engendered by the prophecy of Daniel,<sup>9</sup> why should the phrase not have been

<sup>1</sup> Acts vii. 56; Rev. i. 13; xiv. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. ix. 1-8.

<sup>3</sup> Matt. x. 23; xvi. 27.

<sup>4</sup> Matt. xii. 8.

<sup>5</sup> Matt. xiii. 37, 41; xvi. 27; Luke ix. 26; xvii. 30.

<sup>6</sup> Matt. xvii. 9; Mark viii. 31.

<sup>7</sup> Matt. xx. 28.

<sup>8</sup> John iii. 13; vi. 27.

<sup>9</sup> Cap. vii. 13.

continued in use, and have appeared in the numerous addresses and letters of Peter and Paul? or still more pertinently, why not in the colloquies of the disciples among themselves, as recorded by the four Evangelists? If, on the other hand, the appellation was intended to express the Saviour's human origin, what motive could there have been for a forger to use it at all when desiring to establish such stupendous claims as are made concerning the nature of Jesus? Whichever horn of the dilemma one chooses, it is a very difficult question for those to handle who affirm either that the Gospels were the product of fraud or of unconscious mythical development.

18. But on the theory that Christ possessed a twofold constitution, — one of which was *in* the order of nature, and the other *above* that order, — the apparent confusion in the appellations by which he is designated by different parties is readily explained. If Jesus really possessed the power ascribed to him in the Christian records, the fact that he “became flesh and dwelt among us,” would, from the higher point of view furnished by his heavenly nature, suggest this appellation, since from such a point of view this humanized condition was a special characteristic. But, the more exalted the conception of him entertained by his devoted followers, the less likely would they be to use an appellation which *ex-*

*pressed* his humility, but only *implied* his supernatural character. Such a distinction, however, is altogether too subtle to have been incorporated into a forgery or a myth.

#### V. The Genuineness of the Fourth Gospel.

19. As the Gospel of John has been a special subject of recent attack, and as it is in many respects so diverse from the other Gospels, it is necessary to make some remarks with more particular reference to objections alleged against its apostolic origin.

The external evidence of the genuineness of the fourth Gospel is almost the same as that for the other three. That is, it was universally received as genuine by the Christian churches as early as A.D. 170 or 180. Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Clement of Alexandria, know nothing of any doubts as to its equal authority with the other Gospels. It occupied its proper place in the Syriac and Latin translations of the New Testament made some time during the second century, and in the Muratorian Canon of that period. Passages peculiar to the fourth Gospel are quoted by Justin Martyr<sup>1</sup> in the middle of the second

<sup>1</sup> We are aware of the controversies touching the reality of Justin's quotations from the fourth Gospel, and could well afford (so far as the argument of the present treatise is concerned) to concede all that the author of "Supernatural Religion," and Rev. E. A. Abbot in 9th edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica, Art.

century. The heretics of that period either accepted the fourth Gospel, or rejected it in such a way as to show that the churches in general accepted it.<sup>1</sup>

The slight deficiency in external testimony from the early part of the second century is amply supplied by internal evidence and considerations of a general nature. It is incredible that so important a biography, if unauthentic, should have been foisted into the sacred records within seventy years of the death of its reputed author. The character of the book in question, and the contrasts between it and the other Gospels would render this doubly difficult.

20. The author *claimed* to be an eye-witness,<sup>2</sup> and the frequent and graphic mention of incidents likely to be retained in memory, but improbable as the result of any other cause, fully confirm the claim. He is more explicit in his chronology than the others. It is through him we learn of Christ's four visits to Jerusalem. He fixes the day of "Gospels," and the critics whom they follow, claim. But their objections are by no means sufficient to disprove some of the clearest cases of quotation; as for example, that of John iii. 3. 5, in Justin, *Apol.* i. 61. (See Sanday, p. 290 sq.; Westcott on the Canon, p. 150; Prof. Ezra Abbot in *Unitarian Review* for March, 1880, which puts the matter beyond further question. Norton's discussions of Justin Martyr's quotations is still the standard.

<sup>1</sup> Meyer's *Einleitung*, to his *Kritisch Exegetisches Handbuch über das Evangelium des Johannes*, § 2. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Cap. i. 14; xix. 35; xxi. 24.

Christ's baptism, and the hour of his calling the two disciples to follow him; <sup>1</sup> mentions the grass on which the multitudes sat down when miraculously fed; <sup>2</sup> describes the position of the disciples at their last supper with Jesus, and mentions their gestures; <sup>3</sup> recalls the darkness into which Judas went out from the supper; <sup>4</sup> and the lanterns and torches carried by those who arrested Jesus; <sup>5</sup> and relates the changing positions of Peter at the time of his denial of Christ and the means by which he obtained access to the hall. <sup>6</sup> The ninth chapter may be instanced as exceedingly life-like in the incidents of the dialogue. And so on, "we find everywhere in this Gospel the air and manner of an eye-witness and participant in the scenes recorded." <sup>7</sup>

21. We condense one or two cases of incidental harmony between John and the other Gospels, mentioned by Blunt. <sup>8</sup> Luke ix. 53 reads: "And they [the Samaritans] did not receive him, because his *face was as though he would go to*

<sup>1</sup> Cap. i. 35 sq.

<sup>2</sup> vi. 10

<sup>3</sup> xiii. 21 sq.

<sup>4</sup> xiii. 30.

<sup>5</sup> xviii. 3.

<sup>6</sup> xviii. 15 sq.

<sup>7</sup> Fisher's "Supernatural Origin of Christianity," p. 95. See also, Meyer's *Einleitung*, as above, § 3-5. Also Neander's *Life of Christ*, §§ 5, 11, 71, 108, 116, 118, 120, 121, 192, 198, 234, 279.

<sup>8</sup> *Undesigned Coincidences in the Writings both of the Old and New Testament, etc.* By Rev. J. J. Blunt, B.D. p. 289 sq. New York. 1847.



*Jerusalem.*” Here the cause of the irritation on the part of the Samaritans is expressed in the clause in italics. To go to Jerusalem to worship was to slight the claims of their own temple at Samaria. Now contrast with this the reception of Jesus and the disciples when, at a different season of the year, they were passing through the same place, with their faces *from Jerusalem*. The account is found in John iv., and contains the story of his conversation with the woman at the well. At that time Jesus and “his disciples were treated with civility and hospitality by the Samaritans. They purchased bread in the town without being exposed to any insults, and they were even requested to tarry with them.” Now, while “it was natural that at certain seasons of the year (at the great feasts) this jealous spirit should be excited, which at others might be dormant; and although it is not expressly stated by the one evangelist [Luke] that the insult of the villagers was at a season when it might be expected, yet from a casual expression [Luke ix. 51, ‘When the time was come that he should be received up, he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem,’] such may be inferred to have been the case. And though it is not expressly stated by the other evangelist [John] that the hospitality of the Samaritans was exercised at a more propitious season of the year, yet by an equally casual expression in

the course of the chapter,<sup>1</sup> that, too, is ascertained to have been the fact.”

22. To take an equally unequivocal and far more complicated case, consider the statement of John xii. 1, that, “Jesus *six days* before the Passover came to *Bethany*, where Lazarus was.” John gives no further details of the movements of Christ during this period. Now it is only a careful study of Mark’s account (here, as usual, much fuller in details), which shows that Jesus was at Bethany six days before the Passover. Mark xi. 11, tell us that, “when eventide was come, he [Jesus] went out unto Bethany, with the twelve.” From the numerous occurrences mentioned as having taken place that day (the going of the disciples for a colt; Christ’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem, and his entering into the temple), it is evident that this return to Bethany was for his second night’s lodging, for it was from Bethany, at the Mount of Olives, that he sent forth his disciples for the colt.

On the morrow (Mark xi. 12–15), Jesus cursed the fig-tree on his way to Jerusalem. When even was come,<sup>2</sup> he went out of the city again, doubtless to Bethany, for on the next morning they passed by the same fig-tree again.<sup>3</sup> This brings

<sup>1</sup> John iv. 35. “Say not ye. There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? Behold I say unto you, Lift up your eyes and look on the fields, for they are white already to harvest.”

<sup>2</sup> vs. 19.

<sup>3</sup> vv. 20, 21.

us to the fourth day of his lodging at Bethany. At the close of this day he went out of the temple,<sup>1</sup> and passed over to the Mount of Olives, and we may presume to Bethany.

From Mark xiv. 1, we learn that this was two days before the feast of the passover and of unleavened bread." Thus, in an incidental and most roundabout manner, are we able to see that the direct assertion of John and the extended account of Mark agree in the chronology and main incidents of that week. "How extremely improbable is a concurrence of this nature upon any other supposition than the truth of the incident related, and the independent knowledge of it of the witnesses; and how infallibly would that be the impression it would produce on the minds of a jury, supposing it to be an ingredient in a case of circumstantial evidence presented to them."<sup>2</sup>

23. The Gospel of John does, indeed, differ from the other three in some remarkable particulars; but the differences, however much they add to the labor of the harmonist, confute any theory of forgery or of post-apostolic compilation. We cannot imagine a forger constructing, or the churches accepting, in post-apostolic times a book with such variations from the already received Gospels.

(a) John makes no mention of the birth and childhood of Jesus. He does not allude to such

<sup>1</sup> Mark xiii. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Blunt, as above, p. 302.

significant and striking events as the temptation, the transfiguration, and the institution of the Lord's Supper. He gives none of the parables so abundant in the other Gospels, and relates but two of the miracles that are elsewhere recorded.<sup>1</sup>

(*b*) On the other hand, John adds six miracles not recorded in the other books,<sup>2</sup> among which is the raising of Lazarus. The discourses and conversations which John adds are numerous and very important. For example: the conversations with Nicodemus, and with the Samaritan woman; the discourses on the true bread, the good shepherd, the many mansions, and the vine.

(*c*) There are also some apparent discrepancies between John and the earlier Gospels. They describe Christ's labors as if their principal scene was Galilee; in John the chief scene is Jerusalem. They specifically mention but one visit of Jesus to Jerusalem after his baptism, while John expressly enumerates three and implies a fourth. In the account of the celebration of the last Passover also there is a chronological variance of great apparent difficulty.<sup>3</sup> According to the first three evangelists the Passover was eaten by Jesus and his disciples the evening before his crucifixion. According to John the Passover was yet to be

<sup>1</sup> John vi. 1-21.      <sup>2</sup> ii. 1; iv. 47; v. 1; ix. 1; xi. 1; xxi. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Compare John xiii. 1, 2; xviii. 28 with Matt. xxvi. 17-30; Mark xiv. 12-26; Luke xxii. 1, 13-20.

eaten by the Jews, after the crucifixion. Dr. Robinson,<sup>1</sup> endeavors to show that the word "passover" might refer to the whole festival, or by emphasis to two or three distinct portions of the feast. But whether this or some other possible explanation is correct, it is at any rate certain that the discrepancy is very obvious, and would not have been introduced by a forger, or by one who wished to personate John. And thus in general, we may remark that the more we emphasize the differences between the Gospel of John and the other Gospels, the more nearly insuperable would be the obstacles to its early acceptance by the churches, unless they had indubitable evidence of its genuineness.

24. No authority less powerful than that of an apostle could, without violent discussion (of which we find no evidence), force on the early churches a biography so diverse both in style and subject-matter from those already in vogue. On the theory, however, of its apostolic origin, the peculiarities can be accounted for partly by the individuality of the author's style, and partly by the time of its composition, and the objects for which it appears to have been written. Composed thirty

<sup>1</sup> English Harmony, pp. 196-205; Greek Harmony, pp. 211-224; Bibliotheca Sacra for August 1845, pp. 405-436. For a well-nigh exhaustive treatment of the general subject of biblical discrepancies, see Haley's "Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible." Andover. 1874.

or forty years later than the other Gospels it is in part supplementary to them, as for instance, in elaborating and completing the doctrine of Christ's divine nature, and that of the work of the Holy Spirit.

In its tone and literary style it corresponds well with what we know of the later life and situation of the "disciple whom Jesus loved." It is a mistake to compare it to the fruitless philosophising productions of the Alexandrian Jewish school of theologians. The small space occupied with reference to the "Word" in the first chapter, is in great contrast with later writers. The dignified and self-possessed attitude toward the heresies of the second century is in striking antithesis to the polemics of that later time.

25. Sober criticism agrees with the weighty opinion of Neander,<sup>1</sup> that "there is nothing in this Gospel purely metaphysical or unpractical, . . . but everywhere a direct bearing on the inner life, the divine communion which Christ came to establish. Its form would have been altogether different had it been composed, as some suppose, in the second century to support the Alexandrian doctrine of the Logos [Word], as will be plain to any one who takes the trouble to compare it with the writings of that age that have come down to us. The discourses given in the first three Gospels

<sup>1</sup> Life of Christ, § 71, McClintock's translation.

(mostly composed of separate maxims, precepts, and parables, all in the popular forms of speech), were better fitted to be handed down by tradition than the more profound discussions which have been recorded by the beloved disciple who hung with fond affection upon the lips of Jesus, treasured his revelations in a congenial mind, and poured them forth to fill up the gaps of the popular narrative. And although it is true that the image of Christ given to us in this Gospel is the reflection of Christ's impression upon John's peculiar mind and feelings, it is to be remembered that these very peculiarities were obtained by his intercourse with, and vivid apprehension of, Christ himself. His susceptible nature appropriated Christ's life, and incorporated it with his own."

#### VI. Conclusions.

26. In concluding this portion of our inquiry it is important to notice that the question at issue is not whether the Gospels were written by the persons to whom they are now assigned, but we are chiefly concerned to know if the documents we now have were in existence in the early part of the second century, and were then accepted by the churches as embodying the facts upon which their faith was founded. Of that there would seem now to be little question, nor do the quotations either of the apologists or of the heretics



of that period, indicate that there were any histories of Jesus then in circulation which contained any facts worth speaking of not incorporated into our present Gospels. Considering together the undoubted facts as to the existence of versions during the last half of the second century, and as to the exclusive and authoritative position of the four Gospels at that time, and giving due weight to the fact that the memory of Irenaeus and his associates, and especially of Justin Martyr and his contemporaries, extended some ways back of the period under consideration, the natural inference is, that the Gospels could not have been materially different in the early part of the second century from what they were in the latter part of that century.

27. If now we pause to inquire as to the circumstances which led to the formation of our Gospels we find little but conjecture to guide us. From internal evidence it would seem that the first three Gospels originated about the same time, and in different places, in response to local demands, and depended for reception and endorsement in each case upon their conformity with facts which through apostolic preaching, had become as familiar as household words. Something of this kind appears to be indicated in the introduction to Luke's Gospel. "Inasmuch as many have undertaken to arrange a narrative of those

things which are freely believed among us, even as they were delivered to us by those who were eye-witnesses from the beginning and became ministers of the word, it seemed good to me also, having accurately traced up all things from the first, to write to thee a connected account, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightest know the exact truth with regard to those things in which thou wast instructed.”<sup>1</sup>

28. On all hands it is agreed that the fourth Gospel possesses somewhat the nature of a supplement to the others ; and probably, was composed at a later period. But considered together the Gospels, with all their diversity of form, are a unit in doctrine. “There is nothing expanded in one book which has not been asserted in another. Take whatever may seem to us the distinguishing idea in one of them, and we find a strong expression of it in all the others.”<sup>2</sup>

We turn next to inspect the condition, character, and surroundings of the early churches, to ascertain, if possible, whether the circumstances were favorable or unfavorable for the mythical growth of *such* narratives as are contained in the Gospels, or for either their forgery or extensive corruption.

<sup>1</sup> Professor Noyes's translation.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas D. Bernard. See “Progress of Doctrine in the New Testament,” p. 70 sq.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE CHRISTIANS OF THE FIRST AND SECOND CENTURIES.

1. IN the first quarter of the fourth century (A.D. 312), Christianity had subdued the Roman Empire, and from that time on became the state religion. A hundred years earlier than this, or within less than two hundred years of the death of Christ, the doctrinal controversies so peculiar to ecclesiastical forms of Christianity were everywhere already rife ; and even then, at the close of the second and the beginning of the third centuries of our era, the defenders of the Christian system were among the intellectual leaders of that intellectual age, — an age inheriting at first hand the science of Galen and Ptolemy ; the schools and philosophy of the Antonines ; the jurisprudence of Gaius ; and the histories of Plutarch, Suetonius, Tacitus, Pausanius, and of Appian, Arrian, Justin, Dio Cassius, and Herodian, all of whom flourished between the period of Christ's death and the close of the second century.

2. When the student of natural history finds

a *species* preserving its identity under varying circumstances, and in widely separated regions, he marvels at the power and constancy of that germinant principle which can thus resist and control the diverse natural action of the elements. When we see the erratic movements of innumerable planetary bodies agreeing in the ellipse as their curve, and the sun as one of the foci of their orbits, we can but admire the action of that central force which holds them all within their bounds. It is equally impossible to view the unity of sentiment in the early Christian churches touching the authority of the gospel histories, without perceiving that this agreement must have been produced under the constraint of some most powerful and common objective historical experience.

3. Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans in the latter part of the year seventy, and from that time forth ceased to be the centre of Jewish hopes, whether as cherished in the old form, or as modified by the advent of Christ. If the gospel histories had not been written and generally accepted before the destruction of Jerusalem, it is on any hypothesis a marvel that after that disturbing event, the churches should have agreed with such unanimity in accepting the same body of facts, preserved in the same precise form. All around the horizon in the latter part of the second century, histories of the origin of Christianity

emerge from obscurity. Their substantial identity is manifest. The resemblance of the outcrop in different places indicates a continuous stratum underneath ; for, how otherwise could such similarity be explained ? During the intervening period there was no centralized ecclesiastical power to enforce uniformity of faith. There were then no railroads and steamboats and printing-presses, nor any other ready means for consultation between believers in distant provinces, or for combination or even inter-communication. No general council was called till the fourth century. The council of Nice met A.D. 325.

Persecutions of the Christians, both local and more general, also were rife during the second century. These trials of their faith would naturally tend to intensify the common tradition carried with each section of the church from the centre of the dispersion, and at the same time to limit the influence of whatever had local origin. Moreover, the barriers of national prejudice and of difference in language would operate in their most efficient methods to prevent the pervasive influence of what was not in the original story.

4. Ecclesiastical jealousies between different portions of Christians had also arisen before the end of the second century. Victor, bishop of Rome, A.D. 197, proceeded so far as to excommunicate Polycrates, the aged bishop of Ephesus, and

all the Christians of proconsular Asia with him who differed from the then prevailing usage in the time of observing the Easter celebration. While forty years before this, about A.D. 160,<sup>1</sup> Polycarp had made the journey from Smyrna to Rome to effect an agreement regarding the time of that important festival. Thus early did believers begin to differ upon such unessential points as were not established by some authority from which there was not in their opinion any appeal. Then, as now, their unwavering confidence in the common body of fact, added intensity to the discussion of minor and indeterminate questions. Wherever their independence *could* be asserted the early Christians naturally asserted it; and they were not backward in emphasizing their individual importance.

5. The evident faithfulness of the Christians of the second century to the unquestioned traditions of the preceding generation properly demands more extended notice at this point.

The four Gospels have no competitors in the field worthy of notice.<sup>2</sup> Either they never had any rivals, or the rivals were suppressed by an authority, or an impulse, co-extensive with the

<sup>1</sup> This visit must have been earlier if M. Waddington's opinion be correct that Polycarp's martyrdom occurred A.D. 155.

<sup>2</sup> A chapter upon the so-called Apocryphal Gospels is here omitted, because those productions are really unworthy of any serious consideration.

widely-scattered churches of the second century. We have nearly a thousand manuscripts of the whole, or of portions of the Greek text of the Gospels, written in different countries from the fourth century down, and of course copied from those written still earlier. These have been accidentally found in various out-of-the-way places in Asia, Africa, and Europe.

We have already referred to the different versions existing in these same regions soon after the middle of the second century. These translations show, according to Tischendorf,<sup>1</sup> that they were made from manuscripts containing those incidental but insignificant variations to which such documents are liable, even in the hands of faithful copyists. There are also the works of the Christian Fathers, to whom reference has been made, which abound in casual quotations from all the Gospels; and finally, there are extended *commentaries*, like those of Origen in the third century, and of Chrysostom in the fourth, in which the successive portions of the gospel history are explained and remarked upon for practical purposes.

6. None of these various reproductions of, and references to, the Gospels give tangible evidence of the existence of any accredited history materially differing from that now received. Even the

<sup>1</sup> Origin of the Four Gospels. Translated by W. L. Gage, pp. 203-219.



original *text* of the New Testament in its very details, is in the main established by an overwhelming array of incontrovertible evidence. Such variations as occur are readily traceable to the ordinary accidents of transcription, to natural errors of translation, and to the special circumstances under which, and the individual purposes for which, quotations were made. These variations do in fact, as well as in theory, counteract and correct each other.<sup>1</sup> Such agreement is conclusive evidence that since about the middle of the second century the *widely separated transcribers of the New Testament meant to be faithful, and that they in each case possessed a common original, whose authority was unquestioned.*

7. If there had been rival records, differing in any important particulars from those which are the basis of all this commentary and quotation (and whose precise form has been so remarkably preserved in the manuscripts and versions of the Christian believers so early scattered over all the Roman Empire), it is incredible that they should not by some accident have been preserved. Those who maintain on any theory that the Gospels assumed their present form some time during the second century have not only to account for the absence (in an open field most freely explored) of all vestiges of the lost records, but they must

<sup>1</sup> See above, pp. 58-61.

also explain (what must have occurred on their theory) an incredible change in human nature about A.D. 170. For, certainly, since that period the instincts of Christian believers have afforded remarkable protection to the form of their sacred records. We must suppose, unless there is direct evidence to the contrary, that those same impulses which render it so difficult now to amend even the minor errors of translation in our English version, would have operated with augmented power during the early part of the second century. For then the memory of the apostolic preaching was still a regulative force. The freshness of tradition must at that time have rendered any wholesale changes in the accredited written history of Christ doubly difficult.

8. But, allowing any serious change in the Christian records to have been *possible*, still, in the words of Professor Norton,<sup>1</sup> "it must have met with great opposition; it must have provoked much discussion; it must have been the result of much deliberation; there must have been a great deal written about it at the time; it must have been often referred to afterwards, especially in the religious controversies which took place; it would have been one of the most important events in the history of Christians, and the account of the transaction must have been preserved. There

<sup>1</sup> *Genuineness of the Gospels*, Part i. cap. 1.

would have been distinct memorials of it everywhere, in contemporary and subsequent writings. That there are no traces of it whatever, is alone conclusive evidence that it never took place." Unless we suppose at that time a metamorphosis in human nature which, considering its extent and suddenness, is truly and excessively miraculous, we must infer that the Christians of the second century *believed* the records now in our possession to be the only authentic account of the origin of Christianity.

9. From the Euphrates to the Straits of Gibraltar, the authority of the four Gospels was unquestioned at the period of which we are speaking. All the widely scattered churches of the Roman Empire believed in the apostolic origin of the same gospel narratives which we now substantially possess. That wide-spread belief is what we are compelled to account for. The problem is like that of determining through mechanical laws, the point from which an earthquake shock proceeds. The tidal waves raised by the catastrophe reach, for example, the shores of South America, and of Mexico, and of the islands of the Pacific. From the extent, the direction, and the time of occurrence, the place of origin can be determined. So, from the extent and character of the belief in the genuineness of the Gospels in the last quarter of the second century, and from the similarity in the

contents of the faith maintained by the churches at that time, and from the known character of the medium through which the belief was transmitted, we may, independently of the truth of the records themselves, infer at what period it originated.

10. That there was, at about the beginning of our era, a person called by his followers, Christ ; that he taught the people in Galilee and Judea, and was crucified by Pontius Pilate ; that his doctrines spread rapidly through the Roman world ; that his followers were remarkable for innocency of life and constancy of devotion, and that they worshipped Jesus as divine, is abundantly proved from profane writers of the first century after the crucifixion, as well as from the gospel records and the historians of the early church.<sup>1</sup>

11. TACITUS, writing about A.D. 100, speaks of Nero's charging the burning of Rome "upon a set of people who were holden in abhorrence for their crimes, and called by the vulgar, *Christians*. The founder of that name was Christ, who suffered death in the reign of Tiberius, under his procurator Pontius Pilate. This pernicious superstition, thus checked for awhile, broke out again, and spread not only over Judea, where the evil originated, but through Rome also, whither all things that are horrible and shameful find their

<sup>1</sup> See Paley's Evidences. Part i. cap. 2 ; Rawlinson's Historical Evidences. Lecture vii. Note 4.

way and are practised. Accordingly the first who were apprehended confessed, and then on their information a vast multitude were convicted, not so much of the crime of setting Rome on fire, as of hatred to mankind," etc.<sup>1</sup>

12. To say nothing of the satirical allusions of Juvenal, Suetonius (a contemporary of Tacitus), incidentally alludes to the punishment of the "Christians," calling them "a set of men of a new and pernicious superstition."<sup>2</sup> It is easy to separate the judgment of these historians concerning the character of the obscure followers of Christ, from their testimony as to the existence of these people, and the reasons for their name.

13. While the testimony of Pliny,<sup>3</sup> in his well-known letter to Trajan about this time, may have no more weight than that of his contemporary historians in attesting the numbers of the Christians then in existence, few would fail to accord more confidence to his delineation of their character.

Under the Emperor Trajan, Pliny the younger was governor (about A.D. 110) of the distant provinces of Bithynia and Pontus in Asia Minor. It fell to him in his official capacity to execute the decrees for the suppression of Christianity under his rule. In his official report, the genuineness of which has never been disputed, he says that he has

<sup>1</sup> Tacitus, *Annal.* xv. 44.

<sup>2</sup> Suet. *Neron.*, cap. 16.

<sup>3</sup> *Epistles* x. 97, 98. The translation is from Rawlinson's notes

never been present at any trials of the Christians ; that the " crime " continued to spread notwithstanding the persecutions ; that he was in doubt what to do with those of tender years, and with those who had once been Christians, but had renounced their error ; that an effectual test of their " crime " was to command them to revile the name of Christ, and make sacrifices to the image of the emperor and of the gods, — things which he understood those who were truly Christians could not be forced to do. He confesses that the only guilt or error (except stubbornness in the respects above mentioned), which he could infer from the confessions of those who turned state's evidence, was " that they were accustomed to meet on a stated day before it was light, and to sing in concert a hymn of praise to Christ as a God, and to bind themselves by an oath, not for the perpetration of any wickedness, but that they would not commit any theft, robbery, or adultery, nor violate their word, nor refuse, when called upon, to restore anything committed to their trust. After this they were accustomed to separate, and then to reassemble to eat in common a harmless meal. Even this, however, they ceased to do, after my edict, in which agreeably to your commands, I forbade the meeting of secret assemblies. After hearing this, I thought it the more necessary to endeavor to find out the truth, by putting to the

torture two female slaves, who were called ‘deaconesses.’ But I could discover nothing but a perverse and extravagant superstition ; and therefore, I deferred all further proceeding until I should consult with you. For the matter appears to me worthy of such consultation, especially on account of the number of those who are involved in peril. For many of every age, of every rank, and of either sex, are exposed and will be exposed, to danger. Nor has the contagion of this superstition been confined to the cities only, but it has extended to the villages and even to the country,” etc.

To this Trajan replies that his “ dear Pliny ” had pursued the right course with “ those Christians who were brought before ” him, and enjoins a policy of leniency mingled with severity.

14. We purposely omit citing at this point the direct testimony of the books of the New Testament, and of the Christian Fathers, since we are now considering *external* evidence bearing on the authenticity of their story. The silence of Dio Cassius, of Arrian, of Pausanias, and of Josephus, concerning the Christians may be accounted for without difficulty. Their reticence may have been studied, or they may have been too supercilious to notice in connection with the affairs of a great military nation the growth of what seemed from their lofty position a ridiculous delusion.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Rawlinson’s Bampton Lectures, Lect. vii.



15. It must be confessed, however, that the history of Christianity from the time when the book of Acts was written (about A.D. 63), till the latter part of the second century is extremely fragmentary. Nevertheless, from fragments, as from fossil bones, the complemental parts of the structure may often be confidently supplied. As has already been shown, we find the New Testament substantially in its present form at the close of the second century.<sup>1</sup> We have according to heathen testimony, a great body of Christians widely scattered at the close of the *first* century. We will now endeavor to ascertain the value of the evidence coming to the light between these periods.

16. It should be remarked that the period is not so long as to break the continuity of historical testimony. In weighing the historical evidence for the Gospels, we are to note that an interval of *less than eighty years* intervenes between the lives of some of the immediate disciples of Christ and the mature age of writers who give explicit and ample testimony to the Gospels. Irenaeus, who was taught by Polycarp, one of the apostle John's disciples, declares that John lingered to the time of Trajan, or to A.D. 98. As we have already seen, Irenaeus, besides testifying of the universal acceptance of the four Gospels, writes about them

<sup>1</sup> See above, pp. 185-195.

with the reverent familiarity of a modern scholar. The same treatment of the Gospels is found in Clement of Alexandria and Tertullian, contemporaries of Irenaeus. If, now, we can show individual witnesses connecting our Lord's personal followers with these historic writers, we have an arch spanning the entire period of historic uncertainty. Such witnesses we have.

17. But first let us see of how long a period a single life is competent to testify. A neighboring pastor<sup>1</sup> recently (in 1878) officiated at the funeral of a lady who perfectly remembered seeing Washington in 1789. He also heard this lady, within a few weeks of her death, recite hymns which she said she learned from her mother when she was a very little girl, and which in her last moments she rendered with almost the vigor and expression of a professional reader. She would hardly have spoken of herself as such a "little girl" after she was ten years old. She was only six years old when, as such a "little girl," she said she saw Washington. Thus she was a competent witness as to the existence of certain writings in the year 1793, her testimony bridging eighty-five years.

Now the immediate predecessor of Irenaeus, as bishop of Lyons, was Pothinus, with whom Ire-

<sup>1</sup> Rev. George A. Jackson, to whose recent work on the Apostolic Fathers we are indebted for valuable suggestions.

naeus was acquainted, and who died in A.D. 177, upwards of ninety years old. Allowing to him equal mental powers with the lady mentioned, he was a competent witness to Irenaeus as to the existence of writings of which he may have learned in his tenth year, or in A.D. 97 — at least a year before the apostle John died. As Pothinus not improbably came from Asia Minor, he might have learned from John's own lips words which the latter heard our Lord utter, and have transmitted those words to Irenaeus. Or, if he never saw the apostle, he may have learned the same apostolic truths from some of the other disciples of Jesus, such as Aristion or the presbyter John, who outlived the evangelist.

18. But we are not left to mere possibilities as to such a connection of John with Irenaeus by a single life. Polycarp, made bishop of Smyrna by the apostles, died a martyr [probably] in A.D. 155. In a letter to Florinus, a fellow student, Irenaeus says: "For I saw thee when I was yet a boy in the lower Asia with Polycarp. . . . I remember the events of those times much better than those of more recent occurrence; — as the studies of our youth, growing with our minds, unite with it so firmly — so that I can tell also the very place where the blessed Polycarp was accustomed to sit and discourse; and also his entrances, his walks, the complexion of his life, and the form of his

body, and his conversations with the people, and his familiar intercourse with John, as he was accustomed to tell of it, as also of his familiarity with those that had seen the Lord. How also he used to relate their discourses, and what things he had heard from them concerning the Lord. Also concerning his miracles, his doctrine, all these were told by Polycarp, in consistency with the holy Scriptures, as he had received them from the eye-witnesses of the doctrine of salvation."

Here, then, are two witnesses who talked with Irenaeus, of whom, imperfect as our records are, we positively know that they were contemporary for several years with actual followers of Christ; one of whom detailed to Irenaeus the things of our faith as related to him by the apostle John "*in consistency with the Scriptures.*" If there were two of whom we know, how many such witnesses must there have been of whom we do not know?

19. We have already laid stress upon the fact that these distinguished teachers at the close of the second century do not speak for themselves alone, but for a great body of serious-minded people who had staked every earthly interest upon their faith in the narrative contained in the records to which appeal is made. Those records were even then a *sacred* literature, — the kind most difficult to change or supplant. Within less than a hundred years of the time when the labors of

the personal followers of Jesus closed, we find both the Gospels and the apostolic history and correspondence collected, translated from manuscripts already varying considerably, approved by general consent, disseminated and accepted by widely separated people who spoke three distinct languages and lived on three different continents.

20. It should also be borne in mind in this connection that the Acts and the Epistles, independently of the Gospels, and in a wholly incidental manner, profess to relate the effects of belief in the miracle of the resurrection during the thirty or forty years immediately following its occurrence. They represent that a large number of persons who witnessed the miracles of Christ, and who saw him after he rose from the dead, became so convinced of the reality of the fact, that they "passed their lives in labors, dangers, and sufferings, voluntarily undergone in attestation of the accounts which they delivered, and solely in consequence of their belief in those accounts, and that they also submitted from the same motives to new rules of conduct."<sup>1</sup> The importance of the testimony of the book of Acts, and of the various Epistles to well-known churches, arises largely from what such productions *assume*. They purport to narrate the experience of the early disciples as they *publicly proclaimed* the

<sup>1</sup> The main proposition of Paley's Evidences.

supernatural facts of the gospel narratives on the very spot, and among the very people where they are said to have occurred.

21. In these writings the fundamental facts of the gospel narrative are so frequently reiterated, and the narrative itself of the apostolic labors is so interwoven with incidental allusions to places and persons and institutions, that there can be no doubt of the period when they staked their all upon the truth of the central fact of Christianity and corresponded with various bodies of persons who believed the main doctrines of the gospel. Only the presence of an unquestioned body of objective facts, such as are recorded in the Gospels regarding the death and resurrection of Christ, and perfect familiarity with them on the part of the early disciples, could have secured such well-ordered zeal as characterized the apostolic churches.

22. The extent to which the Epistles of Paul coincide with the Gospels in their portraiture of the character and work of Christ is worthy of more explicit statement in this connection. There is no doubt, for example, that the Epistles to the Romans, to the Corinthians, and to the Galatians, were written before A.D. 60. Yet, in the words of Professor Thayer,<sup>1</sup> "in these four Epistles we

<sup>1</sup> Criticism Confirmatory of the Gospels, in "Boston Lectures" for 1871, pp. 372, 373.

meet with allusions, some more, some less explicit, but all indubitable, to the institution of the last supper,<sup>1</sup> the betrayal,<sup>2</sup> the crucifixion,<sup>3</sup> the resurrection on the third day.<sup>4</sup> Jesus is spoken of as the image of God,<sup>5</sup> the Son of God,<sup>6</sup> the second Adam;<sup>7</sup> his death has saving efficacy;<sup>8</sup> his character is the disciples' pattern;<sup>9</sup> he himself is source of spiritual life;<sup>10</sup> possesses lordship over all men;<sup>11</sup> will be their judge;<sup>12</sup> is the heavenly source of Paul's apostleship;<sup>13</sup> and associated with the Father, is fountain of grace and blessing."<sup>14</sup> "This delineation of Christ, including cardinal facts in his history, and a detailed conception of his person and work, agrees in all its main features with the portrait given by the evangelists; and more especially with that presented by the evangelist John. . . . This conception, too, is not so much presented by Paul as assumed. It is evidently well-known to his readers alike in Asia, in Greece, and in Rome. Not merely are cardinal

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. x. 16; xi. 23.<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. xi. 23.<sup>3</sup> 1 Cor. i. 13, 17; 2, 8; 2 Cor. xiii. 4; Gal. iii. i. 13; vi. 14.<sup>4</sup> Rom. i. 4; iv. 24; vi. 9; vii. 4; viii. 11; x. 9; 1 Cor. vi. 14; xv. 4; 2 Cor. iv. 14; Gal. i. 1.<sup>5</sup> 2 Cor. iv. 4.<sup>6</sup> Rom. i. 3; Gal. iv. 4.<sup>7</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 45; Rom. v. 12 sq.<sup>8</sup> Rom. iii. 25; iv. 25; v. 6 sq.; viii. 3, 32; 1 Cor. viii. 11; xv. 3; 2 Cor. v. 15 sq.; Gal. i. 4; ii. 20, 21; iii. 13.<sup>9</sup> Rom. viii. 29; xiii. 14. <sup>10</sup> Rom. viii. <sup>11</sup> Rom. xv. 9.<sup>12</sup> Rom. ii. 16; xiv. 10; 2 Cor. v. 10. <sup>13</sup> Gal. i. 1.<sup>14</sup> Rom. i. 7; 1 Cor. i. 3; Gal. i. 3; 2 Cor. xiii. 14, etc.



facts like the resurrection, referred to as unquestioned, but referred to as suggestive of spiritual lessons, — lessons familiarly associated with the facts in the reader's habits of thought. 'Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?' The facts themselves, therefore, which were thus associated with Christian instruction, must have been neither recent nor doubtful."

23. We have not space to notice here as it deserves the chain of reasoning in Leslie's "Short and Easy Method with the Deists," but it is important in this connection to allude to it. The argument is drawn from the significance of the early establishment of Christian institutions like baptism, the Lord's supper, the Christian ministry, and the sacred observance of the first day of the week. These institutions purport to be monumental of public facts, and must have been instituted at or soon after the time of their occurrence. We cannot conceive of such observances coming into existence except on the supposition that those first adhering to them believed the things which are commemorated. It is needless to say that in the earliest notices we have of Christianity we find the above significant institutions already established. The observance of these institutions is such evidence to the facts commemorated as the annual celebration of the Fourth of July is to the

Declaration of American Independence. It is a testimony whose "force age has no tendency to diminish."<sup>1</sup>

24. With these considerations before us, to refuse to believe that the historical books of the New Testament were *written* previous to the close of the first century after Christ's death, does violence to all our knowledge of human nature, and to every maxim concerning the processes by which ideas, and *such* literature as the New Testament is composed of, would spread in such a period of history.

Upon scrutiny, it is evident also that the weight of recent critical objections to the genuineness and authenticity of the Gospels has been greatly overestimated. Indeed, these criticisms have scarcely touched the solid body of evidence upon which the Christian faith has all along reposed. No one has ventured to deny that the supernatural element in the history of Christ appears substantially in its present form, before the close of the second century. Criticism has not attempted to invalidate the testimony of Irenaeus, of Tertullian, and of Clement of Alexandria. Those who like Strauss, Baur, and their colaborers and followers, defend the mythical hypothesis, chiefly concern themselves with the closing years of the first century, and the first seven decades of the

<sup>1</sup> See President Hopkins's "Evidences of Christianity," p. 279 sq.

second. As we have seen, this period of transition is not long; and, considering the nature of the case, the deficiency in direct evidence is perhaps not strange — at any rate not unaccountable; while the mythical growth, in so short a time, of such documents as we have, would in any case be strange, and when we take into account all the elements of the problem, is quite inconceivable. The supposition that so original and perfect a character as that portrayed in the gospel histories, and a literature so unique (both in what it includes and in what it omits, in its coincidences and in its discrepancies), could have originated through “the embellishment of a Jewish legend, or from some atoms of mythology in the brains of dreamy, deluded, enthusiastic, but UNKNOWN SOMEBODIES,”<sup>1</sup> is as near an absurdity as any theory in history could well be.

25. In the present state of the inquiry it will probably be admitted by every one that to explain the existence of so great a number of Christians at so early a period, and to account for their wide dissemination, together with the uniformity of their belief and their general acceptance of the four Gospels, some striking historical fact is demanded. Upon reviewing the evidence it would seem that without any shadow of doubt there was a person

<sup>1</sup> See Whately's Annotations of Paley's Evidences of Christianity at the close.

called Jesus Christ, in whose life and teaching the movement known as Christianity had its origin. There can be scarcely less doubt that we have in the four Gospels a correct report of the views concerning Christ's nature, life, and work, current during the lifetime of the apostles, and industriously propagated by them. Prior to the close of the first century of our era, and before the generation to which he belonged had passed away, belief in the miracle of the resurrection of Jesus was, as now, the corner-stone of the Christian system. It remains to be considered whether it is probable that the contemporaries of Christ were deceived.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For a thorough discussion of the principles by which to estimate the value of tradition as a testimony to historical facts, see Sir G. C. Lewis on the "Credibility of Early Roman History;" also Fisher's "Supernatural Origin of Christianity," p. 74 sq.; and chap. xvii. in Rev. C. A. Row's "The Supernatural in the New Testament."

## CHAPTER V.

WERE JESUS AND HIS IMMEDIATE DISCIPLES  
EITHER IMPOSTORS OR DELUDED ENTHU-  
SIASTS ?

### I. **Extent of the Miraculous Element in the New Testament.**

1. CONCLUDING as we must, that the Gospels are not a historical forgery, nor a collection of myths and legends growing up and becoming accredited in the first half of the second century, we are narrowed down to the inquiry, How could belief in these narratives be engendered in the generation among whom the events purport to have taken place ? If we suppose Christianity to be the product of fraud or delusion on the part of Christ and his first disciples, it is proper to collect from their writings and sayings a conception of the character of the imposition and of the extent of the fraud, that we may be in position to judge whether or not the supposition be plausible.

2. According to the story so early accredited, the deeds of Christ and his apostles were not done in a corner, nor in darkness, but publicly, in the open day. Nor was it one or two miracles of a

doubtful order, which they persuaded their contemporaries to believe. We are bound to consider the difficulty of practising deception or of propagating delusion not only in one or two equivocal cases, but in a great number of peculiar instances, connected together in a system, and associated with the highest excellence of moral character and influence.

3. The Gospels record that Christ fed hungry thousands in the wilderness where there were but a few loaves and fishes;<sup>1</sup> that he walked upon water in disregard of the ordinary conditions of gravitation;<sup>2</sup> that he stilled the storm by a word;<sup>3</sup> that he opened the eyes of the blind without resort to surgery;<sup>4</sup> that in similar independence of natural means he cured inveterate cases of leprosy;<sup>5</sup> unstopped the ears of the deaf, and unloosed the tongue of the dumb;<sup>6</sup> restored vigor to the paralytic<sup>7</sup> and soundness to a withered arm.<sup>8</sup> Jesus is also related to have cured fever,<sup>9</sup> and dropsy,<sup>10</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xiv. 15-21; xv. 32-39, with parallel passages.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. xiv. 22-26; Mark v. 48, 49.

<sup>3</sup> Matt. viii. 23-27; Mark iv. 35-41; Luke viii. 22-25.

<sup>4</sup> Matt. ix. 29-31; xx. 29-34; Mark viii. 22-26; x. 46-52, Luke xviii. 35-43.

<sup>5</sup> Matt. viii. 1-4; Mark i. 40-45; Luke v. 12-16; xvii. 11-15.

<sup>6</sup> Mark vii. 31-37.

<sup>7</sup> Matt. viii. 5-13; ix. 1-8; Mark ii. 1-12; Luke v. 17-26; vii. 1-10.

<sup>8</sup> Matt. xii. 9-13; Matt. iii. 1-5; Luke vi. 6-11.

<sup>9</sup> Matt. viii. 14, 15; Mark i. 29-34; Luke iv. 38-41.

<sup>10</sup> Luke xiv. 1-6.

and many obscure diseases,<sup>1</sup> by his simple command, and to have publicly raised the dead.<sup>2</sup> And finally, it is asserted that he was arrested by the Jews and tried for blasphemy;<sup>3</sup> that he was publicly charged before the Roman governor with treason;<sup>4</sup> that his death was demanded by the clamor of his countrymen;<sup>5</sup> that he was crucified by Roman soldiers, and died upon the cross;<sup>6</sup> that to make assurance doubly sure, the soldiers pierced his side with a spear,<sup>7</sup> and set a watch over the tomb in which he was buried.<sup>8</sup>

It is represented that the disciples all deserted Jesus at this crisis, but that after about seven weeks<sup>9</sup> they began to preach publicly in Jerusalem where these events occurred, and before great assemblies, that Jesus had risen from the dead, and had appeared unto them on several different occasions,<sup>10</sup> when they touched him (*a*); spoke with

<sup>1</sup> Matt. viii. 28-34; ix. 32-34; xv. 21-28; xvii. 14 sq.; Mark i. 21-28; v. 1-17; vii. 24-30; ix. 14 sq.; Luke iv. 31-37; viii. 26-37; ix. 37 sq.; xiii. 10-17.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. ix. 18 sq.; Mark v. 22 sq.; Luke vii. 11-18; viii. 41 sq.; John xi.

<sup>3</sup> Matt. xxvi. 59-68; Mark xiv. 55-65; Luke xxii. 63-71.

<sup>4</sup> Matt. xxvii. 1-26; Mark xv. 1-15; Luke xxiii. 1-25; John xviii. 28-38. <sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Matt. xxvii. 35-56; Mark xv. 24-41; Luke xxiii. 33-49; John xix. 18-30.

<sup>7</sup> John xix. 31-42.

<sup>8</sup> Matt. xxvii. 62-66.

<sup>9</sup> Acts ii.

<sup>10</sup> (*a*) Matt. xxviii. 8-10; Mark xvi. 8; (*b*) Mark xvi. 9-11; John xx. 11-18; (*c*) 1 Cor. xv. 5; (*d*) Mark xvi. 12, 13; Luke xxiv. 13-35; (*e*) Mark xvi. 14-18; Luke xxiv. 36-49; John xx.



him (*b*); saw him (*c*); conversed with him (*d*); ate with him (*e*); handled him (*f*); obeyed his commands, and witnessed a miracle (*g*); met him and heard him preach in an assembly of five hundred (*h*); established the fact of his resurrection by many infallible proofs (*i*); and finally, that he ascended before their eyes into heaven.<sup>1</sup>

4. It will be perceived that if this were imposture or self-delusion, the dimensions are so enormous that it must expose itself to detection at many weak points. It was in the first place, calculated to arouse opposition from every quarter. The ecclesiastical dignitaries were pledged by all their self-interest to detect such an imposition; the Roman soldiers suffered the body of Jesus to disappear from the tomb at peril of their lives; at the outset the disciples accepted the logical import of these alleged facts, at the risk of disgrace and persecution; nor can we assume that the com-

19-23; 1 Cor. xv. 5; (*f*) John xx. 24-29; (*g*) Matt. xxviii. 16; John xxi. 1-24; (*h*) Matt. xxviii. 16-20; 1 Cor. xv. 6; (*i*) Acts i. 3-8; 1 Cor. xv. 7.

<sup>1</sup> Mark xvi. 19, 20; Luke xxiv. 50-53; Acts i. 9-12. We have here retained the references to the last twelve verses of Mark notwithstanding the doubt thrown upon their genuineness. If, as many critics suppose, they are an addition by a later hand, that does not destroy their value as corroborative evidence, for they still bear testimony to the uniformity of the early tradition concerning the facts to which they relate, and they certainly were in existence in the latter part of the second century, for Irenaeus recognizes them. — Cont. Haer. iii. 10, 6.

mon people were any more likely then than now to give up long-cherished hopes and expectations except for some adequate motive. The supernatural promises of a man who does not save *himself* from crucifixion, are not the ordinary supports of popular enthusiasm.

## II. Miracles demanded as perpetual Vouchers to a Supernatural Revelation.

5. This is the proper point to introduce some considerations concerning the value of miracles as vouchers to a divine revelation, remembering that in the definition of the term, revelation pertains to truths which are beyond the reach of unaided reason.<sup>1</sup>

It is not correct, as many allege, that miracles now hinder rather than help us in crediting the Christian system. The evidential value of the Christian miracles is the same now as at the initiation of the system. It is true that both at the present time and at the origin of Christianity such a peculiar collection of miracles as are recorded in the Gospels raise *obstacles* which faith must overcome. Such extraordinary miracles demand *extraordinary proof*, and that is just what the doctrines need. The proclamation of such miracles by the apostles at the time of, or soon after, their occurrence, subjected them to the necessity of

<sup>1</sup> In this paragraph we follow pretty closely the line of thought developed by Mozley. See Bampton Lectures on Miracles, Lect. i.

substantiating the miracles by extraordinary evidence before that generation. If the supernatural doctrines of the New Testament had failed of having credentials like those alleged by the early disciples they would now lose their authority, and hence their value; since in that case we should be without proper evidence that the words and acts of Jesus were duly scrutinized at the time.

6. The contrast between Christianity and other religious systems in this respect should be well noted. There is abroad a loose habit of referring to miracles as though it was a very common thing for the founders of religious systems to lay claim to miraculous power, and a very easy matter to establish such claims in popular belief; whereas it is the rarest thing in the world for the founders of religious systems to subject themselves to the hazards of discomfiture, and their systems to the chances of collapse, which the claim of miraculous power openly exercised inevitably brings.

Confucius, Buddha, and Mohammed founded religious systems whose influence has been widespread and prolonged. But their claims to authority did not originally rest upon the basis of miracles publicly performed, much less upon such a cluster of miracles as gather about the person of Christ. Confucius did not even claim inspiration. The miracles of Buddhism are clearly legendary,

and closely resemble the puerile marvels of the apocryphal Gospels. Mohammed, indeed, alleges that the Koran was a revelation direct from God, but he is not related to have established his claim by anything that could properly be called a miracle. The Koran itself was his miracle.

But however extended the influence of Buddhism and of Mohammedanism may have been in former times and over unenlightened nations, they have not had, and are not likely to have, influence with the scientific and progressive nations of the world ; whereas, these are just the nations most under the influence of Christianity. Over these systems of religion Christianity has a two-fold advantage : 1st. Not only do its positive precepts and doctrines do no manifest violence to reason, but in large measure they correspond with the dictates of reason, and conform to analogies in the world of experience. 2d. The positive doctrines of Christianity receive the endorsement of *miracles which were capable of scrutiny at the time of their occurrence*, and whose evidence is still open to verification. It is in miracles, and so far as we can see in miracles chiefly, if not only, that a *supernatural dispensation* can subject itself to the verification which the reason properly demands before accepting it. Without miracles a supernatural dispensation lacks an appropriate beginning. When a prophet announces that he can

forgive sin against God, it is proper that he should submit himself to some extraordinary and tangible test of his authority. If he fail to do this his claims could never be authenticated.

### III. The Theory of Imposture Incredible.

7. If, now, in returning, we direct our attention at first to the theory of imposture, we must be reminded that the existence of a conscious intent to deceive is a disturbing force in the mind of the imposter the influence of which we can roughly calculate. To ignore in our explanation of the origin of Christianity the debasing influence of so great an intention to deceive as *must* have existed on this theory would be like trying to harmonize the theory of gravitation and the motion of the planets while leaving the attractive mass of Jupiter out of the problem. If Hamlet is introduced into a play, adequate allowance must be made for his presence, or the play becomes incongruous. But it is universally conceded that the founders of Christianity maintained a high tone of general character. Their moral precepts are pure; their appeals are to the noblest sentiments of human nature; their encouragements are based on the spiritual aspirations associated with honesty of purpose and unselfishness of desire. The founders of Christianity were poor, but not like Diogenes, proud. They bestowed no outward badge

of distinction upon their followers. They encouraged them by no promises of worldly prosperity or political preferment. Between the history of Christ as we find it in the New Testament, and the familiar history of imposture, there is nothing in common upon which to base a comparison; it is all contrast. We are sufficiently acquainted with human nature to know that if actuated by a desire to establish such enormous pretensions through falsehood, it would not behave in the manner described in the New Testament.

8. But the hypothesis of conscious fraud on the part of Christ and the apostles is too improbable to be seriously adopted by modern incredulity, however satisfactory it may have been in a less scientific age when one miracle was as credible as another. Modern science and the logic which underlies it pay some attention to congruity. Critics of to-day are not bold enough to assert of human nature in the first century indifference to motives which, if they existed at all, must have been overpowering. Manifestly, therefore, it would be a gratuitous waste of time to disprove at greater length what few now maintain.

#### IV. The Breadth of the Inquiry.

9. But we must more specifically meet another difficulty at this point. Christianity, though having a historical basis, does not rest solely on

historical evidence, unless that phrase is enlarged to much fuller dimensions than it possesses in ordinary use. It is true there are documents, and there is the personal testimony, according to those documents, of eye-witnesses. Still, by the narrow rules of evidence sometimes mechanically enforced under the modern system of jury trials, the weightiest elements in the present case might perhaps be excluded. If restricted by the inadequate notions of evidence entertained by those who are slaves to the so-called "chemical method" of proof, the facts of the New Testament history might seem to fall short of demonstration. But, as some would apply these rules we doubt if it could be proved that England is an island, or that the historical Napoleon Bonaparte was anything more than a myth.<sup>1</sup>

10. We freely admit that there is, to *appearance*, a serious draw-back to our argument in the seemingly uncritical character of the first witnesses to the facts of Christianity. Taken by themselves, many of the alleged miracles of Jesus might be paralleled by tricks of legerdemain, or by instances of honest delusion. Often, in the alleged miraculous healing of the sick we could not say from the facts, taken singly, that there was anything beyond the natural effect of a great hope suddenly breaking

<sup>1</sup> See Archbishop Whately's *Historic Doubts Concerning Napoleon Bonaparte*; also Cardinal Newman's *Grammar of Assent*.



upon the depressed mind of the invalid. And if the alleged miraculous multiplication of wine and bread, and the account of Jesus walking upon the water, occurred in an ordinary history, we should rightly enough suspect fraud on the part of the performer and delusion on the part of the narrator. Even in the instances where it is asserted that the dead were raised, one might plausibly allege that there was a failure to put the actual fact of death beyond question.

11. A partial answer to this class of objections, is the great number and variety of the miracles ascribed to Jesus, coupled with the fact that his character has still retained a harmony the beauty and impressiveness of whose proportions the world cannot help acknowledging. The supposition of his superhuman nature is the element which theoretically gives congruity to the whole miraculous history. The main historical proof of the existence of such a nature in Jesus lies in the evidence of his own resurrection. The resurrection is *the* miracle about which all the minor miracles revolve. If that is established, the others follow by analogy upon ordinary evidence, and it is a mere matter of minor detail whether they are more or less.

12. This principle rests on familiar experience. If, for example, Hannibal was really living, and was the adviser of a barbarian prince, the Romans

had no need to wonder that they were checkmated by marvellous strategic combinations, for the military genius of the great Carthaginian general was already known to be sufficient for almost anything in that direction. When Shakespeare has written *one* play or Beethoven composed *one* symphony, we do not wonder at similar productions coming from the same source. The proverb of straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel applies in all its force in this connection.

13. *The Resurrection of Christ is the Great Miracle.* All other miracles are subordinate and subsidiary. The historical proof of Christianity rests chiefly on the evidence that Christ died, and arose from the dead.

But even the evidence of this central fact in certain aspects of it may appear to some deficient, since the first three evangelists do not present formal proof of the fact that Jesus really died on the cross. Upon this point there is ground for cavil also respecting John's testimony to the piercing of Jesus' side with a spear, that it is supplemental and may have been brought in artificially to strengthen a weak place in the argument; and that the testimony of Mary Magdalene, and of some others who are said to have seen Jesus after the resurrection, does not have the appearance of that sobriety of mind usually so much valued in witnesses.<sup>1</sup> The women trembled and were amazed

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xxviii. 8-10; Mark xvi. 8-10; John xx. 11-18.

and afraid; and their words were not believed by the other disciples. Likewise, when Mary recognized Jesus by his words, he forbade her to touch him. Again, the two with whom Jesus walked to Emmaus,<sup>1</sup> did not recognize him at all till just as he, in a miraculous manner, vanished from their sight. But under the circumstances, the confusion and amazement are not unnatural; indeed, their absence would have been more surprising. The reported appearances, moreover, to the eleven when Thomas was absent,<sup>2</sup> and again when this unbelieving disciple was with them,<sup>3</sup> and still again in Galilee when he ate with them,<sup>4</sup> and afterwards in the great assembly,<sup>5</sup> while equally free from the suspicion of having been fabricated, are less open to the charge of being the product of enthusiasm.

14. Still, if the outcome of the life of Jesus had been no more extraordinary than that of Joan of Arc; and the impulse he gave to religion no higher and purer in character than that of Mohammed, the evidence would lack some most important corroborative elements. But no one can deny that the effect of Jesus' life has been *extraordinary in every particular*. As a cause it can only be correctly judged in the light of all its effects. The evidence from which we infer its nature

<sup>1</sup> Luke xxiv. 13-35.

<sup>2</sup> Luke xxiv. 36-40.

<sup>3</sup> John xx. 24-29.

<sup>4</sup> John xxi. 1-24.

<sup>5</sup> Matt. xxviii. 16-20; 1 Cor. xv. 6.

though circumstantial and incidental is cumulative, and conclusive.

On the present supposition (of delusion at the time of Christ's appearance), we must account not only for the circumstance that he and his disciples *believed* the facts as recorded, but that their belief was followed by such effects. They believed it with *such confidence* that neither ridicule, nor persecution, nor the loss of worldly prospects caused them to waver. They believed it in *such moderation* that they never lost their self-command; and actually succeeded in establishing the most practical and powerful beneficent institution the world has ever possessed. They believed it in *such simplicity* and self-restraint that the overmastering idea in their faith did not destroy, but rather established, the perfection of the delineation of their Master's character. They originated the sublimest ideal, and the most perfectly balanced benevolent system that has yet appeared in the world. In many cases those very matters in the history that seem to be open to criticism are marks of sobriety on the part of the witnesses, as well as of their honesty and artlessness.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The objections referred to in the preceding paragraphs are made the most of by the anonymous author of *Supernatural Religion*; also by Renan, both in his *Life of Christ*, and in the *Lives of the Apostles*. But see *per contra*, a thorough and convincing discussion of these points by Rev. Wm. H. Furness, in the *Christian Examiner*, Vol. xv. p. 301 sq., reproduced in "**Jesus and his Biographers**," Part ii. chap. 13.

### V. The Originality of Jesus.

15. The argument for the genuineness and authenticity of the New Testament history is not complete till, to the perfection of complicated historical adjustment and subtile internal harmony already indicated, there are superadded some further statements touching the originality and the beauty of the character of Jesus, and concerning the simple and unaffected style of the narratives in which it is portrayed.

We cannot refrain from remarking also, that, though from one point of view we speak of the biographies of Jesus as artless, from another they must be pronounced the consummate embodiment of the highest design,—but such design as is elsewhere observable only in the works of nature, and may here be denominated supernatural. The New Testament narrative is too large in its conceptions, and too free from errors and incongruities, for us to regard it as anything but genuine history, even though in this case, as so often in others, truth should prove stranger than fiction.

16. Adopting the happy expression of Mr. Martineau, that nothing can be *evolved* from nature which is not first *involved*, we ask what there was in the times when Jesus lived to produce his character and to make its influence so potent in the world? Is the character of Jesus the natural

product of his age? or was he from above? In geologic figure, does this character belong to the historic strata of natural development; or is it, like gold-bearing quartz, injected material? The only way of solving such problems is by inspection and comparison. Each person should examine the facts, and draw his own conclusions.

17. It is possible that some may fall back upon the popular, but indeterminate and rhetorical phrase “natural selection,” and content themselves with remarking that Christianity is preserved on the principle that the “fittest always survives.” This may be true; but it does not touch the real question, which is: How did that originate which is fittest to be preserved? How shall we account for that which natural selection operates upon? The five causes of the growth of Christianity enumerated by Gibbon,<sup>1</sup> are merely the *agencies* of natural selection, and sustain the same relation to the progress of the Christian system which favoring soil, climate, and other conditions do to the growth of seed.

But, in taking a comprehensive view of the subject, we cannot fail to ask concerning the *origin* of the seed, and the *origin* of the manifest adaptation between its powers and the conditions of existence which bring it to fruition. How came there to be, unassociated with the narrow Jewish

<sup>1</sup> Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, cap. xv.

spirit, an inflexible zeal for the propagation of such truths as are set forth in the gospels? How came the doctrine of a future life to be in this case "improved by every additional circumstance which could give weight and efficacy to that important truth?" How came the "intolerant zeal" of the early propagators of Christianity to be so united with "pure and austere morals"? This "pleasing task of describing religion as she descended from heaven, arrayed in her native purity," the historian of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire has expressly and wisely left to "theologians."

18. Those who hold that the New Testament narrative originated in delusion are impaled on the horns of an inevitable dilemma. On the one hand, if they accept the testimony which assigns the composition of the gospels to the first century, they must account both for the originality of Jesus, and for the extreme suddenness of the growth and acceptance of such a collection of myths and legends as the New Testament is upon their theory. If, on the other hand, they discard the generally accepted historical testimony as to the early date of the gospels, they must still account for the existence of that testimony, for the conformity of the narrative to the canons of historical criticism, for the originality of Jesus, and for the persistence with which the supposed



mythical faculty continued to reject incongruous matter, and everywhere steadily preserved in Christ's character the same essential lineaments. But these explanations do not conform to the demand of the scientific mind for simplicity; since, in either case, the supposition of the truth of the main representations of the gospels will, to say the least, most readily and consistently account for all the facts under consideration.<sup>1</sup> But these are propositions which require illustration as well as statement.

19. The creative power of the human mind is limited. Man cannot make bricks without clay. Hence it becomes important, as a matter of evidence touching the historical reality of the New Testament representations of Christ, to consider what materials the deluded fancy of the early adherents of Christianity might have possessed out of which to construct the character of Jesus?

They had on the one hand Jewish exclusiveness, and on the other heathen indifference. Gallio, who cared for none of these things, fitly represented the prevalent religious condition of the Roman world. Propagandism was not the characteristic of the heathen religions of the period.

<sup>1</sup> See Norton's *Internal Evidences*, etc., pp. 96-100; also Prof. J. H. Thayer, in *Boston Lectures for 1871*, p. 373. Recently, Hildekoper, in his *Indirect Testimony to the Gospels*, has constructed a powerful argument for their genuineness by enumerating the historical events to which reference would have been made had they been written later than the apostolic period.

The attachment of the Jewish nation to the familiar forms of their ancient polity, is evinced in the survival of the Jewish race and religion to the present time. The art and literature and political history of that period point, as we have already shown, to extreme moral degradation among the ruling nations. Against all these tendencies Christianity was a protest. Christ was not a sceptic of the period, for his own claims were supernatural. He was not an Epicurean; for he preached that all things should be subordinate to the kingdom of heaven. He was not a stoic, for he went about doing good and relieving the bodily sufferings of his fellows, while the central thought of his preaching was the *sympathy* of God.<sup>1</sup>

20. Though of the seed of Abraham, Jesus was not the prophet expected by the Jews. The character of Christ as a fulfilment of the prophecies of the Old Testament is a subject of great interest, but of no small difficulty.<sup>2</sup> To the early Christian apologists the fulfilment of prophecy was the proof most relied upon in refutation of their opponents; and in Matthew's Gospel it is nowhere left out of sight. As a result of various influences, the expectation of a great national deliverer

<sup>1</sup> See Fisher's *Beginnings of Christianity*, chap. v.

<sup>2</sup> See Westcott's Introduction, etc., chap. ii. "Prophecy a Preparation for Christ," by R. Payne Smith, D.D., being the Bampton Lectures for 1869, Hopkins's *Evidences*, etc., Lect. ix, and all *Standard Works on the Evidences*.

soon to arise, was prevalent among the Jews about the beginning of our era. The gathering strength of this expectation of the "Messiah" appears not only in the numerous direct and indirect allusions to it in the New Testament, but also in the literature current among the Jews in the century before Christ. The enthusiasm culminated in the period just preceding the destruction of Jerusalem, when, according to the testimony of Josephus, numerous persons put forth the claim to be the long expected Messiah, and drew large numbers of their people after them. Insurrections resulted from such deception, and the desperation of the final defence of Jerusalem was, in great measure, sustained by the popular assurance that a heaven-ordained deliverer was about to come. To this fact also, both Tacitus and Suetonius bear testimony.<sup>1</sup>

21. But we need not go beyond the New Testament to find abundant though incidental evidence of the Messianic expectation among the Jews. When Jesus was presented for circumcision, aged and devout men and women were waiting in the temple to see the "Lord's Anointed."<sup>2</sup> When the men from the East inquired at Jerusalem for him who was born king of the Jews, the chief priests and scribes, upon consultation, answered in "Bethlehem of Judea."<sup>3</sup> The multitudes when

<sup>1</sup> Tacitus, *Hist.*, v. 13; Suet. *Vesp.* 4.   <sup>2</sup> Luke ii. 25, 26, 38.

<sup>3</sup> *Matt.* ii. 1-8.

they saw the miracles of Jesus, and again when they led him in triumph, hailed him as the "Son of David,"<sup>1</sup>—the appellation most suited to their expected king; and the blind men and a Syro-Phoenecian woman saluted him by the same title when appealing for mercy.<sup>2</sup> Others revealed the greatness and universality of the national expectation by addressing Jesus as a *prophet* that should come,<sup>3</sup> and as the *Messiah*.<sup>4</sup> Again, the phrase "Son of God," as applied to Jesus, revealed the splendor of the national expectations. "John the Baptist, Nathanael, Peter, and Mary, bore witness to Christ as the Son of God; and the Sanhedrin recognized the title as belonging to Messiah when the high-priest, in the presence of the assembly, solemnly adjured Jesus, saying, 'Tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God.'"<sup>5</sup> Thus as a prophet, a priest and a king, the people were ready to welcome their deliverer. But in the guise of humility and suffering, in the form of a servant conquering by love, and wielding no weapons but those of a spiritual nature, it is not surprising that his countrymen failed to recognize his character and to accept his claim.

22. Although a close study of the Old Testa-

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xii. 23; xxi. 9, 15; xxii. 42.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. ix. 27; xx. 30; xv. 22.

<sup>3</sup> John vi. 14; Acts vii. 37.

<sup>4</sup> John iv. 25; Acts iii. 18, 20.

<sup>5</sup> Westcott, Introduction, p. 145, Matt. xxvi. 63.

ment, and a proper interpretation of its types and prophecies reveal this spiritual character of the expected Messiah's work, and give us now the best of reasons for believing Jesus to be, as he claimed, the person in whom the law was fulfilled and of whom all the prophets spoke, yet during the prolonged humiliation of his life it must have seemed the height of presumption for him to assume the appellations and to claim the privileges and exercise the prerogatives of the Messiah. It is only in the light of subsequent events that we can intelligently apply to Jesus the prophecies which speak of the Messiah's way being prepared by the coming of "Elijah the prophet"; of his many miracles;<sup>2</sup> of his public entry into Jerusalem riding upon an ass;<sup>3</sup> of his rejection by the Jews;<sup>4</sup> of his subsequent universal empire;<sup>5</sup> of the piercing of his body;<sup>6</sup> of the casting of lots upon his vesture;<sup>7</sup> and many other equally striking, and often apparently opposite, predictions applicable to Christ. It is no serious objection that many of the Old Testament prophecies which are applied to Christ require "accommodation" and involve a double sense, for this is what is to be expected from the nature of the subject. The surprising thing is that the life of an obscure Galilean should

<sup>1</sup> Mal. iii. 1; iv. 5.<sup>2</sup> Isa. xxxv. 5, 6.<sup>3</sup> Zech. ix. 9.<sup>4</sup> Isa. liii. 2, 3.<sup>5</sup> Isa. liii. 10, 12 Ps. ii. 6; Micah v. 2; Gen. xxii. 18; xlix. 10.<sup>6</sup> Zech. xii. 10.<sup>7</sup> Ps. xxii. 18.

be the counterpart to so much in Jewish literature and history. No amount of "accommodation" will make the prophecies fit any other person.

23. Nevertheless, the originality of Christ's character and mission is unquestionable. For, however cogent in view of later developments the argument from prophecy may seem, it is clear that at the time of his appearance among the Jews both the person and the mission of Jesus must have been in the highest degree enigmatical. The Scribes could not answer the question, so plain to us, "If David then call him Lord, how is he his son?"<sup>1</sup> No better evidence that his ideas were diverse from those of his people could be furnished, than the fact of their rejection of him; and yet his system did develop from the Mosaic. But compared to that of which it is the development, it is as the flower to the root, or as the butterfly to the caterpillar. The one did not lie in the other in such shape that mere genius could see it beforehand.<sup>2</sup> Considering their ideas of the political importance of their nation, and of the work to be accomplished by the Messiah, the rejection of Jesus by the Jews was not unnatural.

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xxii. 45.

<sup>2</sup> See Pascal's "Thoughts;" Ulmann's "Sinlessness of Christ;" John Young's "Christ of History;" Bushnell's "Nature and the Supernatural," cap. 10; Fisher's "Supernatural Origin of Christianity," Essay xii; Channing's "Sermon's on the Evidences of Christianity;" Schaff's "Person of Christ."

24. On further considering the portraiture of Christ in the New Testament, we find the writers believing that he was born without a human father ;<sup>1</sup> that heavenly messengers welcomed his coming ; that at his induction into his ministry a voice from heaven announced him as the Son of God ;<sup>2</sup> that he resisted the strongest forms of temptation ;<sup>3</sup> that he had power to perform miracles almost without limit ;<sup>4</sup> that he was transfigured in their presence, and Moses and Elijah appeared and talked with him ;<sup>5</sup> that he understood the thoughts of men by direct insight ;<sup>6</sup> that he knew beforehand the manner of his death, and expected his resurrection ;<sup>7</sup> that he was the founder of a kingdom destined to become universal ;<sup>8</sup> that he had power to summon legions of angels to his assistance, and to send a divine Comforter to the aid of his future disciples ;<sup>9</sup> that he expected to judge all nations ;<sup>10</sup> that he had power to give rest to all that were weary

<sup>1</sup> Matt. i. 18-25 ; Luke i. 34, 35.

<sup>2</sup> Mark i. 10, 11 ; Luke iii. 22.

<sup>3</sup> Mark i. 12, 13 ; Matt. iv. 1-12 ; Luke iv. 2-13 ; Heb. ii. 18 ; iv. 15.

<sup>4</sup> See above, pp. 253, 254.

<sup>5</sup> Matt. xvii. 2, 3 ; Mark ix. 2-4.

<sup>6</sup> Matt. ix. 4 ; Mark ii. 8 ; xii. 15 ; John ii. 24, 25 ; vi. 64 ; xiii. 11.

<sup>7</sup> John vi. 64 ; xiii. 1 ; xvi. 22 ; xviii. 4 ; xix. 28.

<sup>8</sup> Luke xxii. 30 ; xxiv. 47 ; John xii. 32 ; xviii. 36 ; Matt. xviii. 19, 20, 28.

<sup>9</sup> John xiv. 16, 18 ; xv. 26 ; xvi. 17.

<sup>10</sup> John v. 22, 27 ; ix. 39 ; x. 28-30.



and heavy laden ;<sup>1</sup> that he was the Messiah so long expected by the Jews ;<sup>2</sup> that he died and rose from the dead and, finally, ascended, vanishing from their sight in the clouds of heaven.

25. On the theory of self-delusion we must suppose that all these extraordinary beliefs existed in the mind of Jesus and of his original biographers in the form of hallucinations. It will be perceived, however, that this would be no mild form of delusion. In ordinary experience it would be called an extremely abnormal species of insanity. In a general way we can calculate the disturbing effects of such illusion as truly as we could estimate the intoxicating effect of alcohol or of any narcotic. We know that men imbibing the notion that they are vicegerents of the Almighty, and that all power in heaven and on earth is committed to them, will be "drunken, though not with wine." They will "stagger, though not with strong drink."<sup>3</sup>

#### VI. Moral Restraints under which the Apostles moved.

26. But what abnormal effects did this belief produce upon the historians of Christianity and upon their unsuspecting followers? It did, indeed, direct the subsequent activity of believers, and control their purposes. But it centered their aims upon the noblest conceivable object, and

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xi. 28, 29.   <sup>2</sup> John i. 41 ; iv. 25, 26.   <sup>3</sup> Isa. xxix. 9.

directed them to the use of means admirably fitted to accomplish their far-reaching plans. As apprehended and preserved by these men, "The teaching of Jesus carried morality to the sublimest point attained or even attainable by humanity. The influence of his spiritual religion has been rendered doubly great by the unparalleled purity and elevation of [their representation of] his character. Surpassing in his sublime simplicity and earnestness the moral grandeur of Sakya Muni, and putting to the blush the sometimes sullied, though generally admirable teaching of Socrates and Plato, and the whole round of Greek philosophers, he presented [as portrayed in the Gospels] the rare spectacle of a life, so far as we can estimate it, uniformly noble and consistent with his own lofty principles, so that the 'imitation of Christ' has become almost the final word in the preaching of his religion, and must continue to be one of the most powerful elements of its permanence."<sup>1</sup>

27. We cannot in reason call the sublime faith of the founders of Christianity hallucination, since it did not otherwise disturb the normal action of

<sup>1</sup> Supernatural Religion (6th ed.), Vol. ii. p. 487. Few readers need to be reminded that the work from which this quotation is taken, is the most elaborate and recent of the attempts to eliminate the conception of the supernatural from Christianity. On this account the tribute to Christ's character is the more noteworthy.

their minds. It did not mar the grace and truth in the picture drawn by them of the human side of Christ's character. On the contrary, Jesus is so perfect in his human development that we can find no fault in him at all. Considering the supernatural elements incorporated into his history, this is a marvel which cannot but increase in impressiveness and significance as thought is centered upon it. It is incredible that enthusiasts should have so loaded the central object of their adoration with supernatural qualities, without dwarfing and distorting the other portions of the figure. But the humanity of Christ is not overborne by the superincumbent weight of his heavenly nature. He is not a monster.

28. The childhood of Jesus is encumbered by no needless supernaturalism. He is subject to his parents; he grows in favor with God and man; he is known as the carpenter, the son of a carpenter; his fellow-townsmen see nothing in him to distinguish him in nature from his brothers and sisters; he is left behind, as any child of twelve years might be, when his parents return from the feast at Jerusalem; save the single mysterious flash of genius displayed before the Rabbis while questioning them and replying to them on this occasion, Jesus performs no prodigies till his regular induction into the ministry. All this is in striking contrast with the apocryphal Gospels,

which uniformly overload the childhood of Jesus with irrelevant and unbecoming miracles.

29. During the period in which he exerted his miraculous power so frequently he is never reported to have employed it for his own benefit, or to have diverted it to unworthy ends.<sup>1</sup> He would not turn stones into bread for himself, nor seek notoriety by needlessly exposing himself to danger, nor use his miraculous gifts to secure prominence in worldly power. He was poor; he was often tired and hungry and thirsty; he was grieved at the tardiness with which his merits were recognized. During his lifetime he failed to raise enduring faith in the minds of his disciples; they witnessed his miracles without being made confident that he had power himself to rise from the dead. All forsook him at his trial. The foremost apostle openly and blasphemously denied him. With one consent all were at first incredulous concerning his resurrection. Up to the point of the alleged ascension of Jesus, the supernatural element in Christ's nature as afterwards preached had not, according to their own account, adequately impressed the disciples.

<sup>1</sup> The two or three apparent exceptions to this last statement (such as the cursing of the fig-tree, and the drowning of the swine), probably admit of satisfactory explanation. But even if they were unexplainable with present light, they are neither serious nor numerous enough to modify our opinion of the miracles as a whole. **They are but spots on the sun.**

But at that point a remarkable change was wrought. Afterwards their faith never wavered ; their mission henceforth was to bear testimony to that which they had heard, had " seen with their eyes " and looked upon, and their hands had handled of the Word of Life.<sup>1</sup> They preached that if Christ were not risen from the dead, they were found false witnesses of God, because they had testified of God that he raised up Christ.<sup>2</sup> The disciples as they were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word.<sup>3</sup>

30. If this confident belief of the founders of Christianity in the divine mission and miraculous power of the central character of their system were a delusion, what set metes and bounds to the action of their disordered minds ? What curbed their fancy and prevented their enthusiasm from destroying the harmony of those portions of the picture we are competent to criticise.

No other personage in history is so vividly portrayed by his biographers as Jesus ; and yet, the brevity of the Gospels and the dispassionate character of their narrative is most remarkable. Indeed, the moderation and self-restraint of the first disciples as depicted in the New Testament, is by itself a most conclusive answer to the charge of self-delusion ; for in view of ordinary experience, it is incredible that in recording the life and say-

<sup>1</sup> 1 John i. 1-3.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 14, 15.

<sup>3</sup> Acts viii. 4.

ings of the master whose power they represented as so great, and whose spirit so charged and absorbed their own, the four evangelists should have limited themselves to twenty or thirty chapters apiece, and should have abstained so scrupulously from attempting to gratify the idle curiosity of man. "No literary fact is more remarkable than that men, knowing what these writers knew, and feeling what they felt, should have given us chronicles so plain and calm. They have nothing to say for themselves."<sup>1</sup>

31. How harmonious have been the lineaments, and how powerful the picture which the world has ever beheld in the character of Jesus as delineated by the fishermen of Galilee! From generation to generation adoring millions have addressed him as their "Redeemer," — "the Anointed King of Israel," — and the "Son of the living God!" And yet, with what singular indifference to apparent effect, as if themselves enchanted by their own work did these men throw away the brush the moment his form was sufficiently outlined for those in distant ages to see it! The utmost effect seems to have been produced with the smallest amount of material. The attentive student cannot well doubt the correctness of John's assertion, that the evangelists were restrained (was it

<sup>1</sup> The Progress of Doctrine in the New Testament, etc. Bampton Lectures, 1867, by Thomas Delany Bernard, p. 56.

not through divine supervision?) from recording a multitude of the things which Jesus said and did, for fear the world would not attend to such lengthy books as should contain the whole.

32. The Gospels "as literary compositions are among the most imperfect of histories. . . . No skill is shown by any one of the evangelists in connecting his relations together so as to form a proper continuous history, however brief. No explanations are given, except a few which are parenthetical and unimportant. With the exception of some passages in John's Gospel, there is no comment on anything told which discovers the writers feelings or state of mind. . . . A writer wholly uninterested in the events related could not have recorded them more dryly than do the first three Evangelists. . . . The whole effect on our minds of what is told, is due to its intrinsic character. . . . Such works could not have been written with the purpose of deception. . . . It is equally clear that they could not have been written by weak-minded and fanatical individuals, whose imaginations had been strongly excited by some extraordinary delusion. No writings can present a stronger contrast than do the Gospels, to what might be expected of fanatics. . . . The Gospels imply throughout that the great outlines of the ministry of Jesus, together with the condition and character of the Jews among whom he ap-



peared, and the more striking immediate results of what he did and taught, were already known to their readers.”<sup>1</sup>

### VII. Christianity most Extraordinary if not True.

33. The phenomena connected with the establishment of Christianity are so extraordinary that they cannot be ignored. They continually challenge investigation, and, so far, have defied all naturalistic explanation. However many minor difficulties may arise in explaining them as the results of a miraculous dispensation, the necessity for supposing supernatural intervention is not avoided by putting such conceptions as the Gospels contain into the minds of deluded dreamers, or the execution of their stupendous plans into the hands of fanatics. If they were dreamers whence came this wisdom, if fanatics, whence the sobriety? A high pressure of steam, necessitates corresponding strength in the boiler. To those who attentively consider the whole phenomenon, it must appear incredible that the supernatural conceptions of the gospel were held in such restraint by the feeble wills of Jewish enthusiasts.

34. Equally also, in view of this class of facts, would it seem a superhuman accomplishment for a forger, or more difficult still, a joint-stock com-

<sup>1</sup> Norton's *Internal Evidences of the Genuineness of the Gospels*, pp. 104-106.

pany of forgers, after having exposed so long a line of attack as that presented in the New Testament, to have so guarded every point, and have so concealed their art as to have deceived not alone their contemporaries, but the unsparing critics and scholars of modern times. While the difficulty of discerning the perfect harmony in the Christian records is a sufficient reply to the charge that they proceeded from the mind of a single forger, and their substantial unity renders the supposition of a plurality of forgers inconceivable, it is equally clear that the moral doctrines of the New Testament, and the exalted conception of Christ's character are not the natural product of minds actuated either by a design to deceive or by the vague impulses of delusion. To suppose that such a structure as we have seen Christianity to be, could be founded either upon fraud or delusion is to impugn the wisdom and goodness of the Creator in constructing human nature, and in establishing that ordinary correlation between the marks of truth and the instincts of faith upon which the reason invariably acts.

35. On the hypothesis however, that the books of the New Testament are what they purport to be, historical records of real occurrences designed to establish supernatural doctrines of great importance, all the moral, mental, monumental, and historical facts concerned in the case fall into order,

and form portions of a congruous whole. But on any other hypothesis such violence is done to the ordinary methods of historical evidence, and to the calculations we can make of the operation of the human mind when under the stress of overpowering motives, that the marvels connected with the miraculous conception of Christ, instead of being eliminated by the process, are rather transmuted into what would be the greater marvel of the inception of Christianity without Christ. As an author already quoted,<sup>1</sup> has forcibly expressed it, "Christianity, if not true, is the most extraordinary thing in the world; really much more extraordinary than if it is true. . . . This world of our experience is ten times more strange and puzzling than it is now, if Christianity is not true."

<sup>1</sup> Sermons preached in Oxford, etc., by R. W. Church, M.A., D.C.L., Dean of St. Paul's, p. 81. London, 1878.

## CHAPTER VI.

### CONCLUSION OF THE WHOLE MATTER.

1. WE have seen that the argument for the existence of a Supernatural Being, supreme in wisdom, power, and benevolence, is so cogent and conclusive that it cannot by any possibility be *disproved* nor can it in reason be discredited. A recent remark of an eminent physicist — the late Professor J. Clerk Maxwell — is no less penetrating than witty. He said he had examined every system of atheism he could lay hands on, and had found that each system implied a God at the bottom to make it workable.

So far from being embarrassed with the fear that miracles are *impossible*, we are rather perplexed that the welfare of the human race should be so closely bound up as it is in the “course of nature;” for if the argument proving the existence and benevolent character of God be admitted as conclusive, it brings to view a *true cause* entirely adequate to the production of miracles, and at the same time, the exigencies of the human race seem to constitute a sufficient reason for their occurrence.

2. This being the case, the question of an actual supernatural intervention in man's behalf becomes one of probability, based on such facts as we have in hand. If God be wise and good, the impress of these attributes must be upon the actual creation, so that a being with sufficient mental capacity, and with the proper clew to the interpretation of the system, could both forecast the future and read the past from any stage of the development. For man to assume that he has no power to interpret the ways of God, is to forget the basis of all rational activity, and to ignore the highest prerogatives of his being. Notwithstanding, therefore, the caution imposed upon man by the evident narrowness of his experience and the limitations of his reason, the interpretation of final causes is both a legitimate and a laudable endeavor.

3. It is evident that man, whatever the manner of his origin, occupies a high rank of existence. He is at the head of the Creation, so far as we know it, and all things are put under his feet. By virtue of his superior intelligence he causes every thing, both animate and inanimate, to serve him, — extending his dominion immeasurably beyond what would be possible if he possessed no higher than the instinctive faculties. Man is himself more than a cog-wheel in the gearing of the material universe. He is higher than the causally connected sequences of physical force.

To some extent he freely controls those sequences and adjusts them to the expression and accomplishment of his own spontaneous designs.

4. But life is too short for the realization of the hopes implicitly promised by the Creator in the bestowment upon man of such exalted powers. If earthly existence be man's only portion, his development is unaccountably circumscribed both by the shortness of life, and by the inflexibility of the course of nature. There is in the human constitution a promise and potency of greater things than can be realized in this present life. IMMORTALITY is the natural complement to such a life as that upon which man is started in this world; and his preparation for a future state becomes an object of the highest order of importance.

5. All the considerations which reveal the inherent worth of the human soul, and emphasize the limitation, the hazard, and the trial of its present situation, increase the antecedent probability of a supernatural intervention in man's behalf, and set in clearer light the propriety of a supernatural revelation. Human want is so great that a supplement to the provisions for it in nature is not incongruous. It is not without reason that mankind has generally expected supernatural help, both in the way of special providence and of miraculous revelation.

When, however, a purported supernatural mes-

essenger appears, we properly look for two classes of credentials. In the first place we may ask if his revelation comports with the known nature of human wants. Second, are his supernatural claims properly supported by external evidence? It is important to keep both of these tests constantly in view, since they mutually check one another.

6. Properly enough the preacher gives prominence to the *subjective* test, and relies for conviction upon the manifest correlation between the provisions of the gospel and the individual wants of his hearers. The faith of the uneducated masses of the Christian church has a rational foundation; since all share in the experiences which, when properly interpreted, reveal the inherent dignity of human nature, the imperative character of its wants, and the excellence of Christianity in its adaptation to the spiritual necessities of man. If, in the ordinary circumstances of human life, the appreciation of these things is inadequate, the delineation of Christ's transcendent character, and the reiteration of his moral precepts, is calculated in the fullest degree to call into exercise the high capacities of man's moral nature, and to develop the sense of his present limitations.

The adaptation of Christianity to the satisfaction of human need, is in itself one of the strongest conceivable marks of design. The system is correlated to the want, as food is to hunger, or water



to thirst, or milk to the necessities of a new-born babe. It would not diminish the evidence of adaptive design to say that use has developed the demand, and that the instinct is a product of inheritance and natural selection. The whole mystery of the case lies in the simple fact that the deepest religious wants find adequate and not unreasonable provision in Christianity. To use for illustration a new-fangled phrase; the fact that *being* is "differentiated" into subject and object,—into mental or instinctive desire, and material and formal supply, is a mystery not to be solved by any new conception of the mode in which the "differentiation" has been brought about. It is not material to the argument for design whether the instinct was independently created in its complete form and sought out the previously provided supply, or whether the presence of the supply has drawn out and developed the desire. The impress of design lies in the *correlation* between want and supply, whatever may be the manner in which the designing purpose entered.

7. Now the manifest adaptation of Christianity to the exigencies of man's condition, properly creates in the uneducated adherents of the system a strong presumption in its favor. Moreover, the general results of the system are known to them in the broad contrast between Christian civilization and that of heathen countries, and their faith

is confirmed by the general confidence conceded to the historical foundations of Christianity by the educated classes. As more than one swallow is required to give evidence of summer, so more than one educated unbeliever is necessary to engender popular fear that the foundations of Christianity are giving way.

8. Those, however, who would rely exclusively on the self-evidencing power of Christian truth, and suffer the questions of historical evidences to fall into neglect, commit a capital error. The argument drawn from the adaptation of Christianity to present want is in continual danger of perversion. Men are liable to take a narrow and incomplete view of their needs, and to exaggerate the relative worth of objects near at hand. The defence against fanaticism and self-consuming enthusiasm lies in *historical Christianity*. The study of the Christian records, and of the interpretation of those records by the church in its varying conditions, is necessary to a continuance of a well-balanced Christian faith in the world. A Christian enthusiasm which has broken continuity with the historical system from which it received its momentum, must soon exhaust its stock of derived energy.

The remarkable success attending the promulgation of Christianity during this present century, is doubtless due in no small degree to the thor-

oughness with which historical Christianity was defended during the latter part of the preceding century. History is by no means a lifeless science; but, as interpreted by ever fresh experiences, presents the most vital class of subjects open to consideration. To reflective students the early records of Christianity can never become dry and dusty.

9. In respect to the adaptation of the doctrines of the New Testament to human want, we have seen that their supernatural character has not seemed incongruous to the successive generations to which they have been most clearly presented. Indeed, the supernatural character of Christianity has constituted an important element of its convincing power. The salvation is no greater than is called for by man's consciousness of need. Were we to remove the supernatural elements from the portraiture of Jesus Christ he would cease to be a perfect character. In that case much of his language would become extravagant, and many of his pretensions blasphemous. The astonishing assumptions of Jesus are capable of being harmonized with the ascription of perfection to his character only on the supposition that he is a heavenly messenger; and, on the other hand, from such a messenger it is proper to ask for miraculous credentials.

10. The supernatural claims of Christianity

have survived for eighteen centuries, and have had ample opportunity to reveal the tendency of their influence. If there had been incorporated into the doctrines anything manifestly out of harmony with the requirements of human nature, ample time has elapsed under the diverse trials to which it has been subjected for that incongruous element fully to reveal itself in its effects.

And here it must be confessed, that some ecclesiastical systems and standards of church doctrine have had incorporated into them so much of untruth that it has been no small task for the church to rid itself of these foreign and debasing elements. The extent to which Christianity has been allowed to be perverted in the Roman Catholic, the Greek, and in the Armenian churches, is one of the profoundest mysteries in the ways of Providence. But if, as we have no doubt will be the case, the world shall be duly warned that ecclesiasticism is not Christianity, that Christian faith does not demand for its growth the miasmatic presence of intellectual stagnation, and that no creed adequately represents the gospel, the final outcome will not be disappointing.

11. The supernatural element in Christianity cannot be eliminated by criticism. So far as we can see, the choice lies between retaining the system with its miracles, and rejecting it altogether. But as the miraculous element is introduced into

the New Testament, it is so guarded by general considerations against abuse, and so limited to its proper sphere, that the church has been able from time to time to free itself by an internal effort, from the deadening and corrupting influence of human bigotry and conceit. In its perversions, Christianity has encountered only the too common experience of a good instrument brought into discredit by the abuse of unworthy craftsmen. Still, under the benign influences of Christianity, and as a natural product of its exalted conceptions of human worth and destiny, modern civilization has arisen with all its grand accomplishments and philanthropic endeavors, while its influence upon individual life and private character in restraining vice and stimulating virtue and all high intellectual endeavors is past computation.

Even Mr. Mill was ready to confess that "religion cannot be said to have made a bad choice in pitching on this man [Christ] as the ideal representative and guide of humanity."<sup>1</sup>

12. As the matter turns out, there was in the world's history when Christ appeared, a crisis so great, that there is no inappropriateness in a miraculous interposition at that time and under the conditions now known to have then existed. In this very lack of incongruity in the circumstances accompanying the introduction of supernatural

<sup>1</sup> *Essays on Religion*, p. 255.

doctrines divine skill is apparent. No one but the Being who formed nature, and sees the end from the beginning, could have so well discerned the crisis, and have so successfully introduced so exalted, harmonious, and triumphant an idea. The signs of the times in which Christianity originated were not such as to be intelligible to the wise and prudent. While to fit together ends and means of such magnitude and delicacy surpasses the reach of human art.

13. It is no justification of incredulity that the evidences of Christianity are, in part, historical ; and that they cannot be weighed in the balances nor dissolved in a crucible. Christianity, indeed, is not an experimental science, i.e. its conditions are not such that we can reproduce them all at will.

But chemistry and physics are the only sciences in which that is possible ; and even in them experiment is practicable to a very limited degree. The spectroscope is a powerful aid to chemical analysis ; but its revelations concerning distant objects like the sun and stars, can never be verified except by the general harmony in the theory which explains the obscure phenomena presented by that remarkable instrument.

14. Neither is astronomy an experimental science. Copernicus and Newton propounded *theories*. We believe their theories because they so well explain the phenomena concerned. But the facts with

which they dealt are, though vast in their sweep, extremely limited in their character. Gravitation is consistent with any number of systems of natural or human history.

15. That the species of prophecy by which eclipses are foretold in Astronomy is not the only criterion of truth is manifest in geology,—a science which deals wholly with *past* forces, inferring their existence and the mode of their operation from the effects still visible. In most cases the effect *might* have been produced in more than one manner. But we instinctively rest in explanations which most nearly conform to the analogy of forces now in operation. The proof of a geological theory (for example, that given strata were deposited by water rather than by wind) consists in a comparison of the effects with the known operation of the supposed cause under analogous conditions. The existence of pebbles larger than could have been moved by the wind, or abraded in a manner not attributable to atmospheric agencies, would exclude the hypothesis of deposition by wind alone; while the correspondence of the individual facts with the calculated effects of aqueous agencies would establish the theory of deposition in water.

16. Natural history, or the genealogical classification of animals and plants proceeds by a similar method. It is a science of the action of



past vital agencies. Recently, an enormous stride has been taken in the attempts to unravel the complicated web woven by the primordial living forces of nature. How far these efforts may be successful it is as yet presumption to say. But the publication of such works as Darwin's *Origin of Species*, and Wallace's *Geographical Distribution of Animals*, indicates the present bent of the scientific mind. The present drift of opinion upon this subject marks a wholesome reaction from ignoble bondage to a mere sensation philosophy. Scientific men are no longer to be cramped by the narrow assumptions of agnostic positivism, which will not admit any rational objects of belief beyond the bare facts of sensation and experience.

The men of science in every department are now foremost in the glorification of belief. They *believe* much more than they know. They do not altogether suspend their judgment in regard to any collection of facts whatever. But, so far as they are wise, they allow facts to *guide* their belief, and the fragmentary nature of their knowledge to restrain their dogmatism.

17. History is a science of past forces, like geology and natural history. It is complicated by the uncertainty touching man's free-will. But human freedom is limited in its scope. The free-will of man does not enable him to fly, or to walk on the water, or to raise the dead. In these and other

natural limitations to the accomplishments of free-will lies the ground for a scientific treatment of human history. No man can rise altogether above the age in which he lives. An impostor cannot altogether free himself from the unconscious influence of his false aim. There can be no exact imitation even of another man's signature. A complete exactness would show that it was a traced copy. A forger of extensive documents cannot perfectly represent the characters and conditions of a preceding age, nor impose without limit upon his own generation. An enthusiast or a dreamer could not fail of leaving upon his work some indication of his state of mind.

18. With the foregoing principles (more fully illustrated in the first and second parts of this treatise) in our minds, we may now intelligently recapitulate the specific evidences of Christianity presented in the third part.

The life of a Jewish peasant, dying at the age of thirty-three, an outcast of his own people and the jest of the heathen world, marks an era in the world's history which all western civilization now recognizes in its calendar. His miraculous history is professedly recorded in the four Gospels. Within a century from the time of his death a large body of sober-minded men were so thoroughly convinced of the truth of these records, that they were willing to undergo any amount of hard-

ship rather than deny the supernatural character of Jesus Christ. This early belief in the miraculous elements in Christinanity is a fact to be accounted for.

19. (a) The supposition that the supernatural part of Christ's history was added through the operation of the mythical faculty is excluded from the field by the unpoetical character of the details recording his acts ; by the moderation of the narratives ; by the originality of Christ's character ; and by the fact that, when stripped of the miraculous elements, what you have left is not sufficient even as the nucleus for a legend.<sup>1</sup> A mythical age cannot go out of itself for material with which to spin its web.

(b) The hypothesis that this belief in the gospel histories had its origin in the delusion of Christ and the apostles is negatived, also, by the originality of Jesus ; by the dispassionate character of the narratives ; by their practical nature ; by the extravagant dimensions of the supposed delusion, and by its success. If a delusion, it was upon such a scale that it must have collapsed under the pressure of the varied trial and criticism to which it has been subjected.

(c) The theory that the founders of Christianity were conscious impostors is incompatible both

<sup>1</sup> It would be a profitable exercise for the reader to strike out from Mark's Gospel the supernatural elements, and see what is left.

with the foregoing considerations and with the high tone of the aims of Christ and his followers and with their freedom from appeal to selfish motives. There was nothing to be gained by such fraud.

(*d*) The supposition of the documents having been forged in the succeeding century and palmed off upon a credulous age, is excluded both by what has gone before, and by the correctness of their numerous incidental allusions to the geography, and to the political, social, religious, and (we might have added) linguistic conditions of the period.

20. This is the process of reasoning spoken of in inductive logic as the "method of difference." We know a good deal about the action of the unrestrained imagination both in the delusions of individuals and of societies. We can estimate from experience the effects upon an impostor's character of a conscious aim to deceive. We may calculate the natural limitations to the success of forgery. Some of the effects under consideration might have been produced by one or other of the above-named causes. But after these causes have been allowed to do their utmost in accounting for the supernatural elements of the narratives in question, the residue is still the main body of the miraculous facts recorded in the Gospels.

21. The supposition that the Gospels are genuine and their history authentic reasonably ex-

plains the whole mass of variegated facts, and does no violence to the general analogies in the case. We cannot *explain away* the early and persistent belief in the historical truth of the Christian records except we first dispose of our belief in divine wisdom and veracity. We cannot believe that the Creator has made human nature and human history so utterly misleading as they must be, if falsehood and delusion could put themselves into such vulnerable position (as that in which we find them if the books of the New Testament be unauthentic), and yet endure such varied tests as these records have successfully withstood, without being exposed. With these facts before us it is impossible to believe that such a complete interpretation of the human heart, and such a long-continued impulse as Christianity has been to the attainment of the noblest virtues, should have originated in so monstrous a delusion and deceit as the system is if untrue. Men do not gather grapes of thorns, nor figs from thistles.

22. Christianity stands or falls with these purported facts in history. Yet it is also true that the outcome of these events was largely dependent on their environment. Christianity, logically considered, is an effect for which we seek an adequate cause. But as usual, the cause is found to be no less complex than the phenomenon. **The error into which we are most likely to fall**

is, that of exaggerating the importance of single elements in the compound cause. Clearly, it is unreasonable to assume that because the conditions of society can *modify* the forces of Christianity when already in motion, that therefore that movement could have originated in the conditions. Copyists may have fallen into incidental errors ; but it is easy to see that such errors could not have penetrated to the substance of the record. Designing or enthusiastic men might have inserted some false items of history or doctrine ; but we cannot believe that fraud or delusion reared the complicated structure of Christianity, and in this singular case has so completely counterfeited the truth as to endure the ordeal of modern criticism.

23. In following up the stream of Christian development towards its fountain head, the historical student traces the influence of numerous tributaries which have here and there imparted particular hues to the borders of the stream. But the central current of Christian faith has flowed on through the ages essentially unchanged. It is identical with that described in the Acts of the Apostles and in the Epistles, and its historical source is revealed in the four Gospels.

24. The argument for the supernatural origin of Christianity is of the kind known as cumulative. As Bishop Butler observes : “ The conviction arising [from this kind of proof] may be compared to



what they call *the effect* in architecture, or other works of art, — a result from a great number of things so and so disposed and taken into one view.”<sup>1</sup> In the last analysis our confidence in such evidence, — whether in the interpretation of cause or of design, — is a belief that the veracity of the Creator is involved and his purposes *revealed* in the complex phenomena before us. It is not in point to object to such evidence that it is only probable, and that our interpretation of it may *possibly* be erroneous, and our previsions mistaken; for, such probabilities are the only practical guide we have in life. While, therefore, the liability to error should chasten our pride and humble our arrogance, it should not, in matters of supreme importance, prevent our acting with energy and decision upon such evidence as we have, — always, however, holding ourselves ready to accept further light when it is afforded.

25. The duty of suspending one’s judgment, and refusing to foreclose the argument till all the evidence is in, is emphatically binding upon him who is disposed to reject Christianity. The case is one in which conservatism is pre-eminently a duty, and discretion the better part of valor. It is a mistake to say that all truth is of equal value, and all beliefs of equal sacredness. As there are orders of being, so there are hierarchies of science; and above every other system of knowledge, that

<sup>1</sup> Analogy. Part ii. chap. 7.



which treats of human destiny and duty, is supreme in interest and importance.

The *possibility* of the truth of so beneficent a system as Christianity, furnishes imperative motives for its further and serious consideration. Its wide-spread acceptance by the most civilized portion of the world throws a very heavy burden of proof on those who reject it. If any do not discern the balance of probabilities which has convinced the majority of good and learned men in civilized lands, this *may* be because of some imperfection in the understanding or in the methods of reasoning of those who are unconvinced ; or, possibly, of some moral delinquency in regard to being influenced by the lower degrees of proof. In demanding fresh signs from Heaven where ordinary evidence has been sufficient to convince the majority who have given it careful attention, there is, certainly, *danger* of unduly exalting ourselves. By withholding credence from Christianity, we do not escape the responsibility of believing strange things ; for in that case we *believe* that the remarkable body of evidence pointing to the truth of the system is *misleading*. If one should be *incredulous* concerning the main facts in the life of Julius Caesar, he would be *credulous* concerning the power of fiction to assume the garb of truth. Incredulity is as grave an error as credulity, and is as positive in its character. If cre-

dulity has a natural origin in indolence, incredulity often has an adequate cause in vanity.

26. At least the attentive student of Christian evidences can positively say that Christianity is far better accredited than any other system of religion; and that there is no demonstrable invalidity in its title. Since so many signs conspire to sustain its claims, if it be a snare the Author of nature must be himself responsible for the delusion. Till something to meet the religious wants more reasonable and better sustained by evidence is provided, a system which has already successfully endured such varied and practical tests of credibility, properly continues to support our hope, and should be allowed to direct our preparation for the life which is unseen and future.

27. We do not hesitate to affirm also, that the ground of hope and the basis of religious duty furnished by the argument is absolutely good; since, the credentials of the system are not only convincing in themselves, but apparently are as satisfactory as the nature of the case will allow.

The man of science is only too thankful when his hypotheses are as well grounded in the explanation of physical facts as the Christian faith is in the explanation of the facts of history and of the moral nature of man. Upon evidence far less conclusive than that adduced in behalf of Christianity, the surgeon resorts to extreme measures

in hope of saving life ; the navigator puts his vessel in order, to meet the probably impending storm ; statesmen advocate measures, and judges maintain laws of far-reaching significance ; and the military commander breaks camp and stakes a dynasty upon the issue of a single battle.

28. The material discoveries of the nineteenth century — startling as they are — are not of a nature to interfere with the ordinary historical and moral evidences of Christianity. Nor does any reason yet appear why the system should grow feeble from age. So far, the lapse of time, instead of diminishing the strength of its historical evidences, has in many ways confirmed them. That hostile criticism has not succeeded in discrediting its records, and that worldliness and self-seeking and the misconceptions of illogical defenders have not defaced its beauty, perverted its character, and destroyed its influence, constitute the miracle of later ages. The ability of Christianity to endure the ordeal to which time and advancing scholarship subject it, establishes its supernatural claims upon an ever-widening basis, and adds to the evidence compelling us to regard the system as a unique divine production of permanent necessity for the moral development of the human race.

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